

THE POLITICS OF NATIONALISM UNDER COMMUNISM IN BULGARIA

Myths, Memories, and Minorities

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Abstract

This study is devoted to politics of nationalism under Bulgarian communism (1944-89). The research aims to analyse the actual content of the Bulgarian communist policies on three main national questions and the ideas behind them. How did Bulgarian communism understand nation and nationalism? How did the Bulgarian Communist Party policy on issues of nationalism change over time? What was the legacy of communist politics of nationalism after the fall of the regime in 1989?

This thesis focuses on three national questions in Bulgaria: ‘the Macedonian Question’, the position of the ethnic Turkish minority, and the politics of Jewish identity. It argues that revealing the ideas behind the communist policies in relation to these questions explains how communism understood national identity in Bulgaria.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of theories of nationalism and communism in relation to Bulgarian communism. Chapter 2 analyses the understanding of communist internationalism and nationalism of the founders of Bulgarian communism and their followers in the context of Marxism, Marxism-Leninism and Stalinism. Chapter 3 discusses Bulgarian communist mythology and argues that under communism Bulgarian national mythology was at the basis of promoting cultural nationalism which in its own turn was used for political mobilisation against ethnic diversity . Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are dedicated to the three national questions mentioned above and their development under communism. Chapter 7 examines politics of nationalism after the fall of the communist regime in Bulgaria in 1989 and argues that by promoting cultural nationalism based on ethnic homogeneity the policies of the BCP in relation to ethnic minorities determined

the politics of nationalism during post-communism in Bulgaria . The chapters are linked by the argument that Bulgarian communism changed its original idea of building a communist nation-state as a political community with class identity at its core to building an ethnically homogenous nation-state with ethnic Bulgarian identity as its organising principle.

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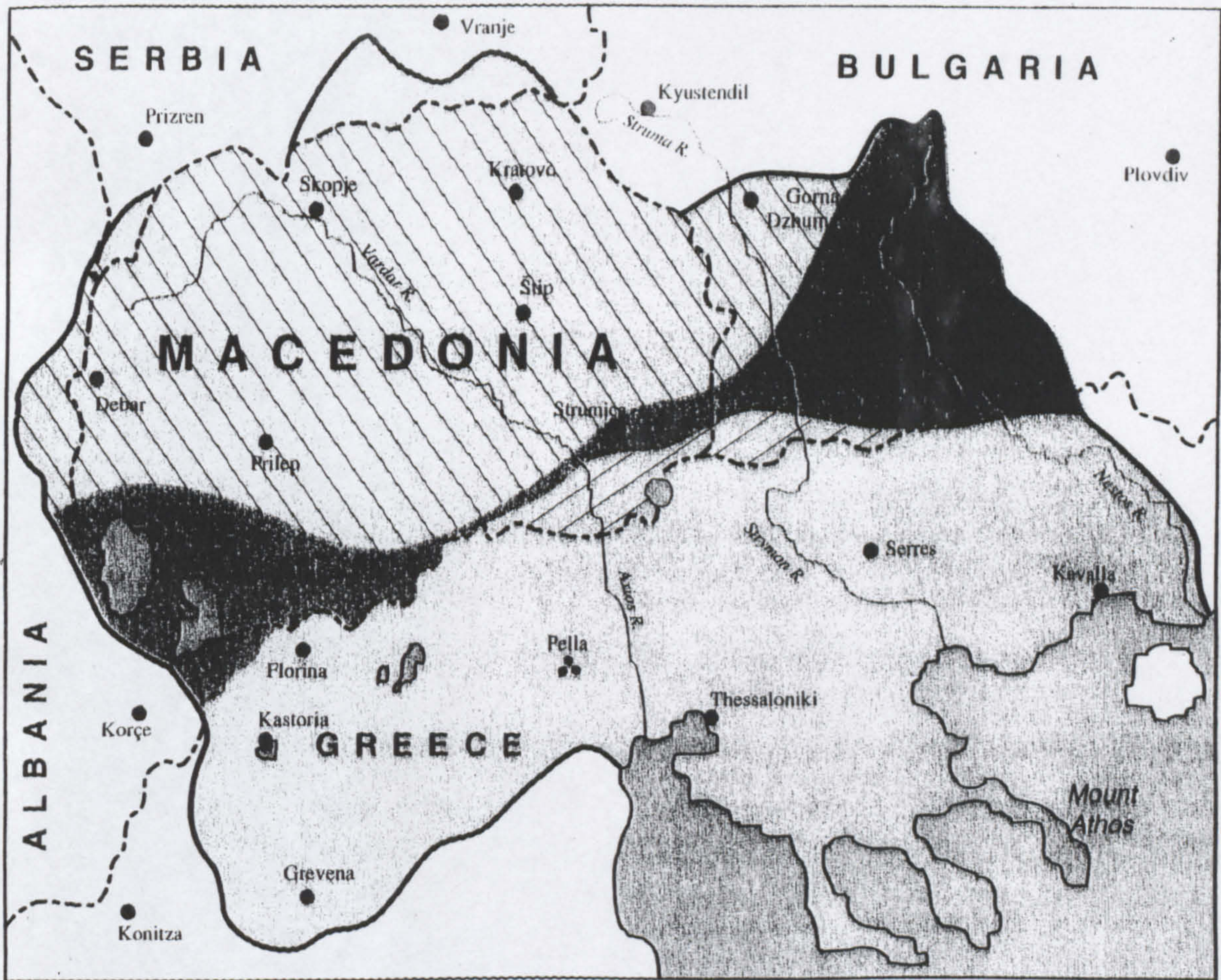
BULGARIA

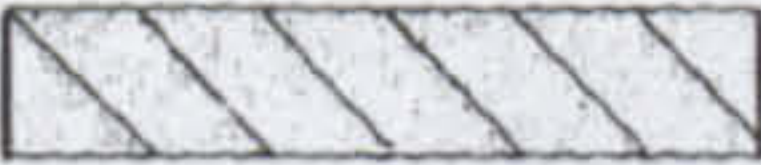




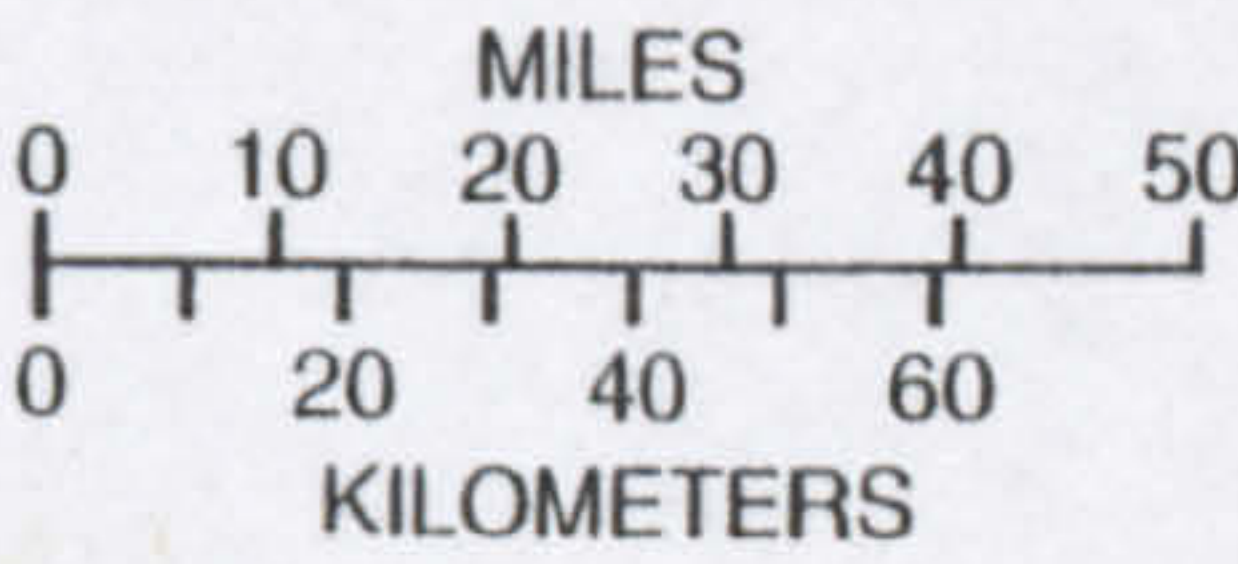
The Balkans, 1878-1885



The Macedonian Question



- Current international borders
- Historic Macedonian boundary (Bulgarian claim)
-  Approximate Serbian claims
-  Approximate area claimed by both Greece and Serbia
-  Approximate Greek claims



Tables

Table No. 1: Main Developments, Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP)

1891	Founding, Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (BSDP)
1903	BSDP splits into left-wing 'narrow' and right-wing 'broad' parties, the former taking the name Bulgarian Worker's Social Democratic Party
1919	BSDP changes its name to Bulgarian Communist Party (Narrow Socialists), or BCP, and is among the founding members of the Comintern
1924	BCP banned
1927	BCP reorganises as the legal Worker's Party
1934-1944	BCP operates illegally as the Bulgarian Worker's Party (Communists)
1944	The party resumes its former name, the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), and seizes power in Bulgaria allied with the left-wing Agrarians and Social Democrats in the Fatherland Front, which organised partisan resistance to the German forces
1946	BCP forms government under the leadership of Georgi Dimitrov
1989	Todor Zhivkov, leader for 35 years, unseated
1990	BCP changes its name to the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)
1996	BSP loses power, first 'opposition' government formed

Table No. 2: Communist Party Leaders of Bulgaria: 1944-1996

1944-49	Georgi Dimitrov
1949-50	Vasil Kolarov
1950-54	Vulko Chervenkov
1954-89	Todor Zhivkov ¹
1989-90	Petur Mladenov
1990-97	Alexander Lilov ²
1997-	Georgi Parvanov

Zhivkov was elected Chairman of the State Council (de facto president of the republic) in 1971 and was succeeded as prime minister by Stanko Todorov, who in turn was succeeded in 1981 by Grisha Filipov. The post of general secretary, abolished in 1954, was revived in 1981 for Zhivkov.

² The party's name was changed in 1990 to the Bulgarian Socialist Party. Significant reforms within the party and its policies were implemented from 1997, after its electoral defeat the same year.

Table No. 3: Prime Ministers of Bulgaria: September 1944-January 1996³

Date of Taking Office	Prime Minister
9 Sep 1944	Kimon Georgiev
22 Nov 1946	Georgi Dimitrov
21 Jul 1949	Vasil Kolarov
1 Feb 1950	Vulko Chervenkov
17 Apr 1956	Anton Yugov
19 Nov 1962	Todor Zhivkov
8 Jul 1971	Stanko Todorov
16 Jun 1981	Grisha Filipov
21 Mar 1986	Georgi Atanasov
20 Sep 1990	Andrei Lukanov
20 Dec 1992	Dimitur Popov
8 Nov 1991	Filip Dimitrov
30 Dec 1992	Luben Berov
17 Oct 1994	Reneta Indzova
25 Jan 1995	Zhan Videnov

³ This table includes Bulgarian prime ministers from the communist seizure of power on 9 September 1944 until the resignation of the BSP government in January 1997.

Table 4: Ethnic Structure of Bulgaria, 1992 ⁴

Ethnic/Religious Group	Population
Ethnic Bulgarians	7,300,000 (85.7%)
Ethnic Turks	800,000 (9.4%)
Roma (Gypsies)	313,000 (3.7%)
Pomaks ('Bulgarian Muslims')	70,000-250,000 ⁵
Ethnic Macedonians	10,800
Jews	3,500
Armenians	13,700
Vlahs	5,160
Karakachans	5,150
Greeks	4,900
Russians	17,000
Total population	8.5 million

Table 5: Religious Structure of Bulgaria (percentages), 1992 ⁶

	Christians	Muslims	Others
Bulgarians	98.0	2.0	0.1
Turkish	1.1	98.8	0.1
Roma	60.4	39.2	0.3
Others	71.8	11.4	16.8
Total	87.0	12.7	0.2

⁴ This data has been drawn according to the official results of the 1992 census, published by Committee in Defence of Minorities Rights (*Komitet za Zashtita Pravata na Maltsinstvata*), Sofia, 1994.

⁵ According to the 1992 census, 70,000 people declared themselves as Pomaks. Unofficial figures estimate the total Pomak population in Bulgaria to be 250,000. In the census, the rest would be assumed to have declared themselves as Bulgarians, Turks or others.

⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

Key Abbreviations

BCF	Balkan Communist Federation
BCP	Bulgarian Communist Party
BSP	Bulgarian Socialist Party
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
EU	European Union
IMRO	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation
IMRO-UMS	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Union of Macedonian Societies
LYC	League of Communists in Yugoslavia
MRF	Movement for Rights and Freedoms
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
RFE	Radio Free Europe
VMRO (IMRO)	Vutreshna Makedonska Revolutsiona Organizatsya ¹
VMRO-SMD	Vutreshna Makedonska Revolutsiona Organizatsya-Suiyz na Makedonskite Druzhestva ²
UDF	United Democratic Forces
UDF	Union of Democratic Forces
UMO-Ilinden	United Macedonian Organisations-Ilinden

¹ Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation

² Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – United Macedonian Societies

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Introduction

The Study of Nationalism and Communism

This study is devoted to the politics of nationalism under Bulgarian communism. It offers a political analysis of how communism and nationalism interacted in Bulgaria. The research aims to reveal the actual communist policies on major national questions in Bulgaria, and the ideas behind them. As a work of political science, the goal of this thesis is to analyse how a number of interconnected issues – communism, nationalism, internationalism, ethnicity and ethnic conflict – functioned in the political system under Bulgarian communism. The study also examines the communist legacy in relation to ethnic nationalism during the post-communist period.

This thesis analyses the political nationalism Bulgarian communists aspired to initially through the establishment of a communist state within the framework of the historic national boundaries – but based on the rational allegiance to a representative state aiming to become an equal member of the communist world. However, as they developed their ideas of communism, Bulgaria's communist elites started mobilising ethnic sentiments of the Bulgarian majority in order to promote Bulgarian cultural nationalism as an inseparable part of the Bulgarian communist tradition. This cultural nationalism was based on the idea of the ethnic homogeneity of the Bulgarian people. It became the flagship of the Bulgarian communist leadership, which aimed to acquire mass popularity and to legitimise the communist regime. Although the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) claimed to have followed the Soviet line unconditionally, analysis of its policies towards

national questions reveals how they were adapted rather than subordinated unconditionally to the requirements of USSR. Here it is important to underline that in communist Bulgaria the rise of cultural nationalism based on ethnicity did not arise from concerns about demands of ethnic minorities, though this often was the official claim of the communist government, but exclusively from the BCP's ideas about maintaining power as a national leadership representing and responding to the aspirations of the ethnic Bulgarian majority as the party understood them. In Bulgaria the experience of oppression did not necessarily result in political mobilisation among ethnic groups. When Bulgarian Muslims, Jews or others chose to perform certain religious or cultural rituals, they did so mainly because they found them inherently meaningful, not for political reasons. The gradual closure of the cultural institutions of ethnic minorities did not lead their members to form movements of ethnic nationalism under communism. Nor did the overwhelming majority of them see the spread of the Bulgarian language as a threat to their cultural identity. While promoting Bulgarian cultural nationalism, the BCP used ethnic minorities to stereotype the 'other' in the process of identifying who and what was 'ours' in order to promote Bulgarian cultural nationalism based on ethnic exclusivity.

This thesis argues that during the de-Stalinisation of Bulgarian communism political nationalism as an official ideology of the BCP was subordinated to cultural nationalism. As Hutchinson acknowledges many political nationalists begin as 'enthusiasts of universalist ideologists' but as soon as they discover that they still have to achieve their political goals within their homelands resort to the instrumental use of mobilising ethnic sentiments. Yet they still aspire to securing a state as part of world civilisation.¹ This helps to explain the broader approach of the BCP, which was maintained throughout the

¹ John Hutchinson, Modern Nationalism, (London: Fontana Press, 1994), p. 43.

communist rule, namely that the final aim of the Bulgarian communist regime was to create a nation-state that belongs to a future larger communist world.

Bulgarian nationalism under communism has been analysed in western social science from two main points of view: first in relationship to Bulgaria being a Soviet satellite and second in view of the contradictions between Bulgarian law as reflected in the communist constitutions and the treatment of ethnic minorities. In relation to the first factor, it has been asserted that Bulgaria's economic interests and desire for political protection in order to maintain stability were a major factor in its subservience to the Soviets.² This argument supports the idea that Bulgarian internationalism was directed by pragmatic calculation. Others believe that 'Bulgarian-Soviet friendship' under communism was based primarily on historic links between Bulgarian communists and their Russian/Soviet comrades, as well as the self-confidence this small nation gained from being close to USSR.³ Bulgarian nationalism under communism has also been

² See J. Brown, Bulgaria under Communist Rule, (London: Pall Mall Press, 1970), p.265, and pp. 297-298, John, Bell, The Bulgarian Communist Party from Blagoev to Zhivkov, (California, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), p. 143, Joseph Rothschild & Nancy M. Wingfield, Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II, third ed., (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 212, Karen Dawisha, Eastern Europe, Gorbachev and Reform: The Great Challenge, (Cambridge, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 40.

³ See P.Lendvai, Eagles and Cobwebs: Nationalism and Communism in the Balkans, (London: Macdonald, 1969), p. 213 and p. 243, Nissan Oren, Bulgarian Communism: The Road to Power 1934-1944, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 3, p. 262, Richard J. Crampton, A Short History of Modern Bulgaria, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 146.

explained as a psychological reaction towards the 'nihilistic' attitude of young Bulgarians towards communist reality and as a way of counteracting western bourgeois influences.⁴

This research acknowledges the validity of these opinions. But it also seeks to deepen their understanding from a different point of view. First, it analyses Bulgarian loyalty to Soviet communism in the context of communist internationalism in relation to the Macedonian question and the idea of a Balkan Communist Federation (BCF). It argues that although the BCP's policy was dictated by the Soviets, it was not always directed against 'non-communist' Bulgarian national aspirations. Bulgarian communists followed the Soviet line in accord with its understanding of internationalism, but it was also possible to square this line with ideas of traditional Bulgarian nationalism. Second, this thesis analyses the Bulgarian loyalty to Moscow through the concept of cultural nationalism disseminated under communism through national mythology as theoretically reworked by communist historiography. It argues that the Soviet connection allowed the promotion of 'old' national myths about Bulgarian-Russian links as opposed to the 'new' myth about 'Bulgarian-Soviet friendship'. This also illuminates the subordinate position of the BCP to Moscow and the desire to maintain it even when Moscow was not satisfied with the BCP's policy in relation to issues of ethnic nationalism.

Nationalism in Bulgaria under communism has also been discussed in the West in relation to the treatment of the Turkish ethnic minority in communist Bulgaria. The reasons for the BCP policy on the Turkish question has been analysed mainly in the context of provisions made by the Bulgarian communist definition of 'socialist legality',

⁴ See Lendvai, *Eagles in Cobwebs*, p. 24 and p. 243.

and in the context of human rights abuses.⁵ This study analyses the Turkish minority issue in communist Bulgaria from a different point of view. By applying modern theories of ethnic conflict regulation to the analysis of the BCP's policy towards the ethnic Turkish minority this thesis offers a deeper insight into the actual interaction between concepts of ethnicity and change in the context of Bulgarian communism. It argues that BCP policies were directed by ethnic nationalism as an official nationalism of the Bulgarian communist state which aimed to strengthen the communist regime as the leadership of ethnic Bulgarians. This argument counters two main beliefs in post-communist scholarship: that the communist policy towards the Bulgarian Turks was a result of demographic concerns about the decline of the ethnic Bulgarians compared to ethnic Turks⁶ or was caused by the irrational behaviour of communist leaders whose 'rationale went beyond any historical, legal or humane logic and norm.'⁷

The position of the Jews under Bulgarian communism has been exclusively observed by western scholars as an emigration issue after the end of the Second World War and as a minority rights issue under the Bulgarian communist regime.⁸ This study argues that the

⁵ Brown, Bulgaria under Communist Rule, pp. 14-15. On discrepancies between Bulgarian communist constitutional provisions and the BCP policies towards ethnic minorities see also Hugh Poulton, The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict, (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1994), p. 131.

⁶ See Ali Eminov, Turkish and Other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria, (London: Hurst & Company as Book Series No. 6 of the Institute of Muslim Minorities Affairs, 1997).

⁷ See Antonina Zhelyazkova, Introduction., Between Adaptation and Nostalgia: The Bulgarian Turks in Turkey by Antonina Zhelyazkova (ed.), (Sofia: IMIR, 1988), p. 18.

⁸ See Peter Meyer, Bernard D. Weinrub, Eugene Dushinsky and Nicolas Sylvan, The Jews in the Soviet Satellites, (New York, The American Jewish Committee: Syracuse University Press, 1953), Frederick B. Chary, The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution 1940-1944, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972).

communist leadership promoted the idea of being the 'saviour' of the Bulgarian Jews during the Second World War in support of Bulgarian cultural nationalism that claimed that Bulgarians were not anti-Semitic 'by culture'. Bulgarian cultural nationalism also required the cultural assimilation of the Bulgarian Jews mistrusted as being connected to outside foreign powers. This research also explains the competing trends within Jewish politics before the establishment of communist power in relation to their participation in the Bulgarian communist movement. It argues that their attitudes towards emigration to Israel were determined by the complexities of Bulgarian national and international politics as well as by their own ideas of what Bulgarian Jewish identity should mean under communism.

The Macedonian question under Bulgarian communism has been discussed from two main points of view: as an issue of dispute among the Balkan communist parties prior and during the Second World War around the idea of the creation of Balkan Communist Federation and as a question of Bulgarian foreign policy after the establishment of communist power in Bulgaria. In relation to the first point of view most western scholars claim that the Macedonian question under Bulgarian communism was the main bone of contention in relation to the communist internationalist movement.⁹ The Macedonian question has also been analysed as a 'minority issue' causing tension between Bulgaria

⁹ See Joseph Rothschild, The Communist Party of Bulgaria: Origins and Development, 1883-1936, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), Walter Roberts, Tito, Mihailovic and the Allies, 1941-1945, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), L.S.Stavrianos, Balkan Federation: A History of the Movement Toward Balkan Unity in Modern Times, (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1964), Crampton, A Short History, Hugh Poulton, The Balkans.

and Yugoslavia during communism.¹⁰ This research supports the argument made in this tradition, namely that before the split between Tito and Stalin Bulgarian communism offered a new approach towards the Macedonian question by recognising Macedonia as a constituent republic of communist Yugoslavia and declaring that there was a Macedonian nation in Bulgaria in accord with the ideas of Soviet communist internationalism. But it also argues that the BCP's policy underwent changes and moved beyond the international dimension of communist politics. This thesis analyses the Macedonian question in communist Bulgaria from a political science point of view and asserts that the BCP's policy was based not only on pragmatic considerations dictated by international communism but also on the broader approach of the Bulgarian communist leadership towards ethnicity and nationalism. It argues that the policy towards the Macedonian question reveals the understanding of the BCP that ethnic identity is a fixed 'blood-and-soil' phenomenon and could only be changed forcibly.

This study is new to the Bulgarian scholarship on nations and nationalism under Bulgarian communism, which generally claims that nationalism was suppressed by the BCP – though this view has not been exclusively Bulgarian and has been applied by western scholars to the entire region of Eastern Europe.¹¹ This research shows that the

¹⁰ See Robert R. King, Minorities under Communism: Nationalities as a Source of Tension among Balkan Communist States, (Massachusetts, Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1973), chapter 10, 'Historical Debates: Macedonia', pp. 187- 219.

¹¹ See Kiril Neshev, Balkanskiyat Sblusuk na Tsivilizatsii, (Sofia: Sv. Kliment Ohridski, 1996), Vera Mutafchieva, Introduction., in Mutafchieva (ed.), Sudut nad Istoritsite: Bulgarskata Istoricheska Nauka. Dokumenti i Diskusii 1944-1950, (Sofia: Marin Drinov, 1995), vol.1, Janusz Bugajski, Introduction., in Janusz Bugajski, Ethnic Politics in Eastern Europe: A Guide to Nationality Policies, Organizations, and Parties, (Armonk, New York, London: M.E. Sharp, 1995), Charles A. Kupchan, Introduction: Nationalism Resurgent, in Kupchan (ed.), Nationalism and Nationalities in the New Europe, p. 1.,

interaction between internationalism and nationalism in the context of Bulgarian communism was more complex than being 'on the defensive' as a reaction to the policies of Soviet intervention or Yugoslav designs concerning Macedonia, as asserted by Pundeff,¹² or an illustration of incompatibility, as asserted by Mutaftchieva, who claims that the idea of communist internationalism as introduced by USSR was a violation of Bulgarian national independence which aimed to deny the traditional and 'natural' national idea of all Bulgarian politicians and intellectuals except the Marxist-Leninists.¹³ This research also dissents from the view that Bulgarian communism disregarded Bulgarian nationalism or transformed it into nihilism or a 'perversity' of Zhivkovism.¹⁴

Developments in Bulgaria during post-communism in relation to nationalism have not been the subject of systematic research. Bulgaria after 1989 has been often omitted or mentioned only briefly in scholarly accounts of nationalism in the post-communist world. There are two main reasons for this. First, post-communist Bulgaria became neither part of post-Soviet studies nor studies dedicated to the collapse of Yugoslavia. Also Bulgaria is not generally included in studies dealing with Central European post-communist countries nor in those analysing Romania or Albania in depth. Post-

David S. Mason, Revolution and Transition in East-Central Europe, 2nd edition, (USA: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 143-144.

¹² Marin V. Pundeff, 'Bulgarian Nationalism' in Peter F. Sugar and Ivo J. Lederer, Nationalism in Eastern Europe, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1969), pp. 159-165.

¹³ See Mutaftchieva, Sudut nad Istoritsite, 1995).

¹⁴ See Deyan Kiuranov, 'Bulgaria: Where It Comes From, and Where It Is Trying to Go', in Deyan Kiuranov, Evgeni Dainov, Vassil Garnizov, Bulgaria in Transition: Three Points of View, (Sofia: Centre for Social Practices, 1996), Neshev, Balkanskiyat Sblusuk na Tsivilizatsii, 1996 and Alexander Lilov, To Overcome the Distortions Among the Turkic-Speaking and Muslim Population in Bulgaria. Report (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1990).

communist Bulgaria has been analysed mainly in terms of economic development and as a problematic post-communist political democracy.¹⁵ In the context of ethnic nationalism after 1989 the Bulgarian way been analysed primarily in relation to Turkish politics and the recognition of independent Macedonia (FYROM) in 1991.¹⁶

This study offers an overview of post-communist developments in Bulgaria which explains that the rise of ethnic nationalism culminated while the communist regime was still in power as a result of a complex interaction between Bulgarian cultural nationalism and communist management of ethnic conflict. The rise of Turkish politics on the eve of the changes in 1989 was a reaction towards already ethnicised politics under the leadership of the BCP. The research analyses the problems of the ideological transformation of the BCP during post-communism in relation to issues of Bulgarian nationalism. Although the former communists in Bulgaria claimed to defend the unity of the Bulgarian state on the grounds of civic rights, until 1996 their policy continued to be marked by the promotion of exclusively Bulgarian cultural nationalism.

¹⁵ See Ivo Banac, 'Nationalism in Southeastern Europe' in Charles A. Kupchan (ed.), Nationalism and Nationalities in the New Europe, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 118, John D. Bell, 'Democratization and political participation in 'postcommunist' Bulgaria' in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot (eds.), Politics, Power, and the Struggle for Democracy in South-East Europe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 353-402.

¹⁶ See Ali Eminov, Turkish and Other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria, (London: Hurst & Company as Book Series No. 6 of the Institute of Muslim Minorities Affairs, 1997), Luan Troxel, 'Bulgaria' in Zoltan Barany and Ivan Volgyes (eds.), The Legacies of Communism in Eastern Europe, (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 227-244., Andrei Georgiev and Emil Tsenkov, Bulgaria and the

Terminology

The main terms which required full research for this thesis are as follows:

Communism. Communism was the political system based on the particular brand of Marxist philosophy - Marxism-Leninism. Marxism-Leninism represented Lenin's ideas about how Marxist theory should be applied in practice. Marxism-Leninism rested on two main premises: a highly organised communist party leading the communist revolution, and a strong and centralised communist state controlling the society. Marxism-Leninism as the theory of communism came to political power in the 1930s in the USSR and spread to the countries of Eastern Europe after the Second World War. This thesis asserts that the communist pattern of institutionalisation in Eastern Europe and in Bulgaria in particular was essentially a Russian political model. The term communism is also used in this thesis in its meaning as a system of beliefs, which did not derive exclusively from Marxist-Leninist theory, though this was the official claim of the communist parties, but also from the complex interaction between implicit meanings of various policies and popular perceptions.

Communist Internationalism. Communist internationalism has been associated with the idea that a communist revolution would be achieved by the unified struggle of the world proletariat. Because of the role of the proletariat as the driving force of the communist movement communist internationalism has been also often defined as a proletarian internationalism. At the core of the idea of communist internationalism was the nature of

Recognition of Macedonia (1991-1992), (Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy (Ethnic Conflicts in Eastern Europe: Security and Human Rights Implications, 1993).

the relationship between different national communist parties. In defining communist internationalism one has to differentiate between the concept of internationalism expressed in the writings of Marx and Engels, in Marxism-Leninism and in Stalinism. For the purposes of this study communist internationalism is discussed in the context of these models of thought in order to clarify their meaning in relation to the Bulgarian Marxist-Leninist tradition.

Nations and Nationalism. Despite the differences between various types of nationalism, Smith argues that it is possible to present a general definition of nationalism: nationalism is a social and political movement, which is based on the assumption that individuals possess a collective consciousness of belonging to a particular homeland and political community. The goals of nationalism usually are to protect the unity, autonomy and the identity of the respective nation (or potential nation).¹⁸ It is in this sense that nationalism is used throughout this thesis, unless specified otherwise.

The distinction between political and cultural nationalism is essential for the understanding of the development of concepts of nation and nationalism under Bulgarian communism. As Hutchinson asserts, political nationalism works within the framework of a territorial homeland in order to secure a state. Political nationalists view that the nation is a 'civic *polity* of educated citizens united by common laws.'¹⁹ The ultimate objective of political nationalism is the national state, which represents those

¹⁸ This definition draws on Smith's definitions of 'nation' and 'nationalism' in Anthony Smith, National Identity, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp.13-14 and pp. 72-73.

¹⁹ See John Hutchinson, The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism, (Allen and Unwind: London, 1987), pp.12-19.

members with citizenship rights. Political nationalism also aims to achieve autonomous state and institutions.

Cultural nationalism on the other hand seeks a moral regeneration of the community.²⁰

Whereas the objectives of political nationalism are essentially modernist in that it seeks to 'secure a representative state for their community' so that it might participate as an equal in the developing world civilisation, cultural nationalism considers the state as accidental and a product of mechanical and rationalist attitude which imposes uniformity on society.²¹ Both types of nationalism sometimes merge into each other but most importantly often political nationalists use cultural nationalism in order to mobilise a political constituency.²²

Political nationalism is state-orientated whereas cultural nationalism is essentially communitarian. Political nationalism, argues Hutchinson, espouses essentially rationalist approach and seeks to override traditional differences in order to create a homogenous society and to win a representative state. Cultural nationalists in general reject the 'legal-rational concept of integration' and propose to organise society around the concept of the uniqueness of the nation.

Kohn also asserts that there is a distinction between political and cultural nationalism. He believes that the former is 'rational' whereas the latter is 'mystical', but that both depend on the level of socio-political development of a community. In the European context political nationalism developed first in the West whereas cultural nationalism was to be

²⁰ John Hutchinson, Modern Nationalism, (London: Fontana Press, 1994), p. 41.

²¹ Ibid., p.43-44.

²² Ibid., p. 43.

found in the East, where the vision of the nation-state was based on 'mystical organic bonds' between people and land.²³ Kohn argues that the people of Eastern Europe and the Balkans developed cultural nationalism, which later turned into the aim to establish nation-states.²⁴ The difference between the West and the East underlines that in Central and Eastern Europe nationalism grew 'in protest against and in conflict with the existing state pattern - not primarily to transform it into a people's state, but to redraw the political boundaries in conformity with ethnographic demands'.²⁵

Ethnicity and Ethnic Nationalism. Ethnicity appears in the form of the idea of *ethnie*, which has been defined as constituting six main features: 1) a common proper name, to identify and express the 'essence' of the community, 2) a myth of common ancestry, a myth rather than a fact, a myth that includes the idea of a common origin in time and place and that gives an *ethnie* a sense of fictive kinship, 3) shared historical memories, or better shared memories of common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration, 4) one or more elements of common culture, which need not be specified, but normally include religion, customs, or language, 5) a link with homeland, not necessarily its physical occupation by the *ethnie*, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with Diaspora peoples, 6) a sense of solidarity on the part of at least some sections of the *ethnie's* population.²⁶ Smith also believes that there is a distinct model of nationalism in the Eastern European tradition, a model of the nation based on

²³ See Hans Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, (Macmillan: New York, 1945), pp. 18-20 and pp. 329-31.

²⁴ Hans Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background, (USA: Collier Books, 1969), p.4.

²⁵ Ibid., p.329.

²⁶ See John Hutchinson & Anthony D. Smith (eds.), Ethnicity (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) pp. 6-7.

such an 'ethnic' conception of the nation, which defines the nation 'first and foremost as a community of common descent'. The western model of the nation, according to him, is based on 'historic territory, legal-political community, legal-political equality of members, and common civic culture and ideology.'²⁷

Thus ethnicity is understood as a basic ingredient of cultural nationalism. Cultural nationalism often uses ethnicity in order to define itself in terms of its own distinctiveness. Ethnic nationalism aims to expand into cultural nationalism and from there it may aspire to political nationalism, which would require the formation of a state unit. Typically such a state would claim legitimacy on the basis of the common ethnic origins and culture of the nation. Thus ethnic nationalism is defined mainly as a movement which claims that the nation is organised primarily around ethnicity.

Both political and cultural nationalism are constrained to realise their vision within the framework of a historic ethnic community. But political nationalism may use ethnic sentiments only instrumentally in order to unite different groups in a national state, whereas cultural nationalism may centre around the idea of ethnicity itself.²⁸ Ethnicity becomes a 'potential driving force of cultural nationalism claiming exclusivity and fixed nature'.²⁹

Ethnic Group, Ethnic Minority, National Identity. 'Ethnic group' is used in this research to mean 'a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic

²⁷ Ibid., p.11.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

²⁹ Ibid., 13-14.

elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood.’³⁰ Ethnic groups could be ‘dominant’ or ‘subordinate’. In both cases the definition of *ethnie* given above it is an attribute to ethnic groups.

The term ‘ethnic minority’ is used in this thesis to designate a subordinate ethnic group, which forms a ‘subsystem with limited access to roles and activities central to the economic and political institutions of society.’³¹ The idea of *ethnie* is also central to understanding the relationship between ethnicity and nation in the context of ethnic and national minorities. An ethnic minority could be defined as a national minority when it has a historic ‘nation’ but at present lives outside its political boundaries.³² In this sense the Turkish minority in Bulgaria is a national minority whereas the Pomaks constitute an ethnic minority. In some cases the two terms could be applied to one and the same minority. Bulgarian Macedonians could be defined as an ethnic minority in the context of the Bulgarian nation if it is accepted that there is no Macedonian nation, or as a national minority provided that it is recognised that there is a Macedonian nation.

‘National identity’ as used in this research is defined by five fundamental features: 1) a historic territory or homeland, 2) common myths and historical memories, 3) a common, mass public culture, 4) common legal rights and duties for all members, 5) a common economy with territorial mobility for members.³³

³⁰ Richard Schermerhorn, ‘Ethnicity and Minority Groups’, in Hutchinson, John, & Anthony Smith (eds.), *Ethnicity*, (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 17.

³¹ Ibid., p. 18.

³² ‘National minority’ could also mean that an ethnic minority is in the process of establishing a national identity and national state.

³³ Smith, *National Identity*, p.14.

The Scope of the Topic

For the purposes of this study, I have constructed my own time periods for looking at communism and nationalism in Bulgaria:

1. Bulgarian communism before coming to power : 1891 - 1944.
2. Bulgarian communism consolidating as the political power of Bulgaria: 1944-1948.
3. Bulgarian communism during Stalinism: 1948 - 1956.
4. Bulgarian communism under the leadership of Todor Zhivkov: 1956-1989.
5. Bulgarian post-communism: 1989-1996.

In relation to nationalism and internationalism Bulgarian communism went through two main thematically defined periods of development. During the first period, the Bulgarian communist movement aspired to the establishment of a centralised state with the possibility of being included in a Balkan Communist Federation at a later stage. During this period the BCP professed political nationalism requiring loyalty to the Bulgarian socialist/communist state. During the second period, the communist leadership in

³⁴ See Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p.1.

³⁵ Smith, National Identity, p. 14.

³⁶ George Schöpflin , 'Nationalism and Ethnicity in Europe, East and West', in Charles A. Kupchan (ed.) Nationalism and Nationalities in the New Europe, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p.39

³⁷ This list is based on Smith's definition of ethnic community, modified in accord with the specific characteristics of ethnic groups in Bulgaria. See Smith, National Identity, p. 21.

Bulgaria subordinated political nationalism to cultural nationalism requiring loyalty first to the Bulgarian ethnic community. During this period the final aim stated in the doctrine of Bulgarian communism continued to be the building of a communist state as a political community based on highly developed means of production and 'socialist consciousness', but the instrument to achieve it was exclusive cultural nationalism.

Bulgarian post-communism, as defined in this research, began in November 1989, when dramatic changes in the communist leadership started. Communist ideology was officially abandoned, yet political and economic reforms in Bulgaria were held back. This was due in part to the legacy of communism. But there was also a lack of substantial reforms in the communist party of Bulgaria, which managed to maintain power for most of the time until 1996. During this period, Bulgaria was uncertain about its direction. The country's insecurities were further compounded by the collapse of the USSR and the eruption of the Yugoslav crisis in the early 1990s. In the winter of 1996-97, the BCP government resigned under pressure from mass protests in the capital Sofia. New elections were held and the opposition bloc, the United Democratic Forces (UDF), came to power. Bulgaria entered a new stage of political development by declaring a firm intention to seek membership in the EU and NATO. For the purposes of this study, this phase is Bulgaria's final break from communism.

The Approach

This research is a work of political science and as such it offers an analysis of the politics of communism and nationalism based on modern theories of communism, nations and nationalism, national mythology, ethnicity and ethnic conflict. This study uses history in

order to recount what happened, but does not claim to have a historical approach. Rather, it aims to analyse the events, accounted for in works of history, in political terms. There are a number of excellent histories of Bulgaria, Eastern Europe and the Balkans, which this study uses as main sources of reference.³⁸

The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis analyses three core national issues in communist Bulgaria: the Macedonian question, the Turkish minority and the Bulgarian Jewish community. Each of these questions forms a separate chapter of the thesis. I chose these questions as the core topics of the research for one major reason: *The Macedonian Question, the Turkish minority and the Jewish community are directly linked to the fundamentals of the Bulgarian nation and nationalism and its development under communism.* There are a number of minorities' issues which this study did not focus on. Nevertheless, understanding their development under communism contributed to the general overview of Bulgarian nationalism. Among them are the Roma (Gypsy), Gagauz, Tatars, Armenians and Vlachs. In my view, these groups are more strictly appropriate to the study of minorities' rights rather than the broader problem of a politics of nationalism under communism. The Pomaks form a special case, closely linked to the Turkish issue but also quite distinct because of being Bulgarian language speakers, and therefore are treated in a separate section within the consideration of the Turkish minority.

³⁸ See Richard J. Crampton, A Short History, L.S.Stavrianos, The Balkans 1815-1914, (Hinsdale, Illinois: Dryden Press, 1958) and Barbara Jelavich, History of the Balkans: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 2 vols.

The rest of the research examines the intellectual background and interactive dynamics between communism, internationalism, nationalism, and myth.

The Chapters

Chapter 1 presents the overview of the literature on the topic. It conceptualises nations and nationalism in general and particularly in relation to communism and modernity. The overview of the literature presented here discusses theoretical views on communism and nationalism in general and in the context of the communist revolution in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. It analyses theories of communism and nationalism which choose as a starting point the conceptualisation of nation and nationalism and from there critiques the relationship to Marxism and Marxism-Leninism. The main argument here is that, as Gellner pointed out, Marxist theory did not offer a satisfactory explanation for nationalism as a phenomenon of modernity because it focused on class rather than culture in its broad sense.³⁹ The chapter also offers an overview of literature discussing communism and nationalism in a different way - by looking at the meaning of nations and nationalism in Marxist and Marxist-Leninist theory as a starting point and from there explaining the relationship between the two. From this point of view Marxism and Marxism-Leninism did not fail to comprehend nations and nationalism in the world but conceptualised them as stages of human development rather than permanent historical phenomena.

³⁹ See Ernest Gellner, Thought and Change, (Great Britain: Redwood Press Limited, 1972).

Chapter 2 outlines the basics of Marx and Engels', Lenin's and Stalin's views on issues of nationalism and internationalism in order to explain the foundations of Bulgarian Marxist-Leninist theory on nations and nationalism. This chapter argues that external aspects of national questions in communist Bulgaria were to be dictated in accord with the principles of Marxist-Leninist communist internationalism, and analyses the theory of the idea of creating a Balkan Communist Federation as a solution to national questions. It also points out that in their writings and party documents Bulgarian communist leaders claimed adherence to Marxism-Leninism but hardly indicated exactly from which concepts of classical Marxism, Marxism-Leninism or Stalinism followed their policies for mobilisation of Bulgarian cultural nationalism through linguistic homogenisation during the 1960s and forcible assimilation of ethnic minorities during the 1970s and the 1980s.

Chapter 3 analyses the Bulgarian communist mythology. This chapter argues that communism designed not only a new but, also, a largely incoherent mythology. Yet communism used this mythology to legitimise itself as the 'antique' order of Bulgarian life. As an ideology with an uncertain future, communism needed the accomplishments of the past. For this reason communist mythology had to interact with the national body of myths. It also tried to present Bulgarian national myths as communist alongside its own system of symbols and rituals.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are dedicated to the three national questions in Bulgaria with which this study is concerned: the Macedonian question, the position of the Turkish minority and Jewish politics under communism, respectively. These are not case studies of minorities. Each chapter rather analyses how and why communism politicised ethnic identities and what were the consequences of this process. The Macedonian question has been a long-standing historical problem in Bulgaria. The politics of Macedonian identity

and nationhood are at the core of understanding the Bulgarian nation under communism. Chapter 4 argues that the BCP failed to develop a consistent policy on the Macedonian question. Communist politics also deepened the anxiety of the Bulgarian consciousness in relation to the Macedonian question by raising a fundamental question of nationhood: Can national identities change? The politics of the Turkish minority after the end of the Second World War reveals how communism handled the complex attitude towards the Turkish presence in Bulgaria, which reflected the memory of the Ottoman rule. Chapter 5, which is devoted to the Turkish issues, argues that communism was driven by the idea that Bulgaria should be an ethnically homogenous nation-state and therefore aimed to eliminate Turkishness. Bulgarian communism denied the existence of the Turkish identity. This caused the biggest ethnic crisis in the modern history of Bulgaria. The politics of the anti-Turkish campaign of 1984-85 invoked the old myth of Bulgarian suffering and redemption. This chapter argues that the BCP mobilised Bulgarians against Turks through the old belief of Bulgarians as victims of ethnic persecution at the hands of the Ottomans. The peculiarity of the Pomak identity and the way Bulgarian communism understood it is given special attention in Part II of Chapter 5. Pomaks' experience under communism is analysed as closely related to the development of Turkish issues in communist Bulgaria. Chapter 6 examines communist attitudes and policy towards the Bulgarian Jews. As elsewhere in Eastern Europe the Jewish question during the Second World War was connected to the Jewish involvement in the communist movement. The overwhelming majority of the Jews who remained in the country after the mass resettlement to Israel viewed that communist Bulgaria would become their true homeland. But they were greatly disappointed by the actual communist view and policy towards the Jewish identity. Bulgarian communism offered to the Jewish community full assimilation into the ethnic Bulgarian identity, though with some very marginal concessions such as individual permission to retain Jewish names. The central

argument of this chapter is that under communism the regime patronised the Bulgarian Jews and used the community for the purposes of promoting ethnic Bulgarian nationalism.

Chapter 7 analyses the fall of Bulgarian communism in the context of the politics of nationalism. It examines the post-communist period of Bulgaria in relation to the national questions discussed in the thesis. This chapter argues that the legacy of the communist approach to nationalism determined the politicising of ethnic issues after the collapse of the communist regime in 1989. Two major themes of post-communist development in Bulgaria are discussed in this chapter: the way in which communism in Bulgaria was brought down, and the legacy of communism in Bulgarian politics in relation to ethnic issues and nationalism. The central argument here is that much of the transformation of Bulgaria started in 1989 and was guided by the politics of ethnicity. The legacy of the politics of nationalism under communism is analysed by examining how ethnic identities created new political parties. Ethnic politics on the scene of Bulgarian post-communism became crucial for the further development of Bulgarian nationalism.

I hope not to have overused two of my skills while writing about Bulgaria: my language fluency and my own experience with nationalism under communism. Rather I hope that an intimate insight into Bulgarian politics has given this research not bias, but passion.

Chapter 1: Overview of Literature – Theories of Communism and Nationalism

I. Introduction

The key to understanding the relationship between communism and nationalism is the concept of modernity. Communism as an ideology claimed to bring modernity. Yet nationalism had its own objectives of modernity and was in place before communism came to power in Eastern Europe. This tension over the modernising role of the two great social forces drove the changes which communism brought to the nation-state. Understanding this tension helps explain the political culture of communism, and the ways in which it developed state traditions in Eastern Europe. The question of modernity also provides the key to comprehending the communist idea of the nation and nationalism, in Eastern Europe as a whole and Bulgaria in particular. Communism represented the ‘new’ world order of the time, whereas nationalism was seen as the ‘old’ social organising principle. Communism was supposed to replace nationalism, but instead it was nationalism that finally replaced – if not triumphed over – communism. For its part, nationalism has been seen as being an especially Eastern European political tradition, which communism could not overcome. From this perspective communist interaction with nationalism preserved the latter in its original shape.

This study asserts that the main reason communism competed with nationalism was that nationalism was seen as a source of legitimacy, which communism lacked. Unable to legitimise its political power communism transformed itself into an ideology of the nation. Rather than ‘overcoming’ nationalism, communism in fact drew on and in many

ways strengthened nationalism. Communism was also incapable of creating an alternative to nationalism because it tried to deny nationalism before it actually understood the role nationalism plays in Eastern European politics. That role was primarily as a legitimising force for political actors.

Bulgarian communism has been largely analysed through the particularly close connection the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) had with the Soviet Communist Party and Soviet communism. This close relationship is key to understanding the basics of Bulgarian communism. But the crucial factor in determining the course of Bulgarian nationalism under communism was that the Bulgarian-Soviet connection did not prevent Bulgarian communism from becoming a nationalist ideology. On the contrary, on many levels the Soviet connection facilitated the further development of Bulgarian nationalism after the Second World War. Indeed, it was Bulgarian nationalism that encouraged the close connection to Russia and the Soviet Union – and thus to Soviet communism. Bulgaria was not more susceptible to obedience than any other communist country. The main reason for its subordination to the Soviets as a political satellite was its nationalist ties, which in turn encouraged the promotion of communism as nationalism.

The relationship between Bulgarian communism, nationalism and language is illustrative of this political dynamic. The BCP policy on language education was designed after the Soviet model. The main communist innovation was the compulsory study of Russian language. For most countries, such a reform would be seen as a threat to national culture. Yet this was not the case in Bulgaria. The study of Russian did not undermine the Bulgarian language as one of the most important features of Bulgarian national identity. The close Bulgarian-Russian linguistic connection served to re-enforce the national myth

of the civilising mission of the Bulgarian people, which was strongly promoted under communism.

Communism aimed to change the entire social structure of Eastern European society. In Bulgaria, communist modernisation affected the countryside and the peasantry in a particularly harsh way. Communism tried to integrate the predominant rural culture into the urban environment, with ambiguous results. When communism failed to achieve social cohesion, it tried to compensate with nationalism. A lack of social integration was not solely a problem of communism, but rather a continuation of the long-standing problem of the political traditions of the Eastern European countryside. Communism inherited these traditions, and although it introduced radical changes, such as collectivisation, the peasantry never internalised the new social principles it had to live with. Despite massive industrialisation, the Bulgarian countryside remained deeply conservative in its political outlook. Communism could only win support there by representing itself as the protector of the very same traditional order of life which it threatened.

The complex relationship of Bulgarian nationalism to communism is also illustrated through the prism of ethnic conflict. The theory of ethnic conflict under communism has been discussed mainly in minority studies or as a question of nationalities policy - the implementation of the communist policy towards people of different nationalities living under the communist regimes. Communism did not deliver equality for minorities. This study argues further, however, that it never intended to. In Bulgaria, ethnic conflict was a direct consequence of the BCP's understanding of the nation-state as a homogenous ethnic unit, which developed gradually. Bulgarian communism used methods of managing ethnic conflict widely practised in ethnically divided societies elsewhere -

ranging from assimilation to expulsion. At the same time the specific conditions of ethnic conflict under communism derived from the history of Bulgaria, which has aspired to national unity since the collapse of the Ottoman empire.

II. Claims to Modernity: Nationalism *versus* Marxism and Communism

Communism declared that it had brought modernity to Eastern Europe. Modernity was achieved through radical social revolution driven by the universal unity of the proletariat. Mass industrialisation and education were supposed to give all people equal access to political power. This political order was called 'people's democracy'. Communism claimed that modernity meant a better life for everyone loyal to communist ideals. Modernity was to be achieved through elimination of all hostile differences, including hostile national differences. Thus modernity also meant homogeneity. Communist citizens were defined as people possessing 'socialist consciousness' and class identity. Class-based social development was an exclusively communist idea based on the Marxist theory of capital distribution. It presupposed that modernity was essentially about economic advancement. Modernity was a construct to be implemented in the communist universe where there would be no antagonistic national units. Modernity was meant to be total and applied to everyone in an equal manner.

Contrary to this concept, other theories of modernity, without rejecting the communist approach based totally on Marxism, understood nationalism as being at the core of modernity. Many modernists argue that modernity is about homogenising society through mass industrialisation and literacy, which in its own turn creates the nation. According to Gellner, Marxism failed to comprehend modernity because it did not recognise it as a culturally complex phenomenon. Marxist theory could not sufficiently explain either modernity or nationalism, because it concentrated on the economy. It did not see education and literacy as the basis of any political unity, but rather as tools of class equality. Gellner agrees that modernity was about eliminating inequality. But he sees inequality as a result of the uneven diffusion of modernisation, not exclusively in terms

the distribution of capital, as Marx did. Gellner understands modernity as a particular mode of humanity, which created the nation as the new 'structure' and the 'changing culture' of society.¹ He defines pre-modern society as based on the notion of kinship. Modern ones, he believes, are united under the flagship of nationality and directed by the bureaucracy. Gellner's theory underlines that the minimal requirement for modernity was literacy. Mass literacy, he argues, was possible only if there was a 'nation-sized' educational system. He sees the nation as 'the minimal political unit in the modern world (i.e., one in which universal literacy is recognised to be the valid norm)'.² Thus according to him, language and the mass knowledge of language became the unifying basis of the modern society. The modern community had to 'speak' a language, and all its members should understand it. Modernity, according to this Gellnerian concept, became inseparable from the understanding of the political community as a nation. Further on Gellner sees the development of the nation as a result of the mobilisation of industrial and intellectual resources. He believes that the politicisation of these modernising factors created the nation. Ethnicity, according to Gellner, was at the core of the nation, but not ethnicity alone. Rather it was ethnicity within a political context, as determined by modernity. This formed the foundation principle of the nation: 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist - but it does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on, even if as indicated these are purely negative.'³ Gellner distinguishes ethnicity and nationalism as ways of justifying the nation as a 'genuine', not 'natural' phenomenon. He does not believe that nations and national identities were 'natural' or primordial, but rather 'time - and context

¹ Ernest Gellner, Thought and Change, (Great Britain: Redwood Press Limited, 1972), pp. 154-155.

² Ibid. p. 159.

³ Ibid. p. 168.

- bound'.⁴ Here lies the biggest difference between the Gellnerian concept of the nation and Marxist theory. Marxism did not deal with ethnicity. Consequently communism denied ethnic diversity as a major ingredient of the societies over which it ruled.

This framework explains why communism could not create a viable alternative to national identity. Communism was a modern model of social development as much as it offered a 'new' identity based above all on class. But it lacked an understanding of identity as a complex phenomenon, sometimes including but also sometimes excluding class, and including cultural identifications only. It aimed to eliminate a great deal of the context of modernity expressed in culture in its very broad sense and to ingrain people's identities in the communist revolution alone.

Anderson also sees modernity and nationalism as closely linked. As with Gellner, this is not in denial of but rather in response to Marxist thought. Anderson thinks that both modernity and nationalism were products of capitalism. He believes that Marxism was incapable of debating modernity because it did not comprehend that both modernity and nationalism were products of capitalism: 'nationalism has proved an uncomfortable *anomaly* for Marxist theory' because Marx spoke of class as being a national unit.⁵ Like Gellner, Anderson also thinks that education and language are the major facets of modernity. But Gellner argues that nationalism is centred around the cultural roots of the collective. Anderson believes it is based on what he calls 'the imagination of the nation'. Anderson understands language as a way to 'imagine' the nation as a unified entity. He claims that modernity led to the idea of the nation by allowing people to 'imagine' the

⁴ Ibid. p. 151.

⁵ Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Rev. ed., (London & New York: Verso, 1991), p.3.

nation. Print capitalism was the essential element of modernity, making it possible for people to imagine themselves in a number of new ways. Print languages, Anderson argues, became the basis of national consciousness.⁶ The act of reading is the power which narrates identity. A nation's biography is constructed through the particular way in which people remember or forget this narrative.⁷ The idea that each nation is 'imagined' - and thus also always in the process of 'imagining' - defines nationalism as an expression of the particular way people feel the nation. It touches upon bonds of solidarity, which become apparent when the nation is mobilised for political action. This particular imagination, according to Anderson, is modernity itself.

Anderson's theory of the nation as an 'imagined community' is not unrelated to the communist understanding of modernity. To an extent, communism also operated on the level of imagination. It conceptualised nationalism as a false bourgeois reality and a decadent fantasy. It claimed that nationalism existed primarily in people's minds, as opposed to social and economical reality, which according to communism, was ruled by the class struggle. In these terms, the theory of communism classified nationalism as an instrument of the bourgeoisie, which aimed to blur social reality in order to achieve political domination. People were supposed to leave the irrational world of nationalism and enter 'material reality'. Yet at the same time, communism presented itself as a particular vision - or 'imagination' - of an ideal world without nationalism. The nation and nationalism by implication were somehow less important compared to the rest of the political world.

These modernists, then, reject the concept of nationalism as a product of a particular set

⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁷ Ibid. pp. 204-206.

of political and historical events. Instead, they understand it as a universal phenomenon based on cultural change. Both Gellner and Anderson suggest that the concept of nations and nationalism emerged as the dominant concept at the on-set of modernity. Their studies of nationalism end with the establishment of the nation-state as the main political unit. But this is actually when communism was introduced to Eastern Europe - after nationalism. Thus communism and the communist state were not so much part of modernisation but rather a strange and confused phenomenon in 'the sick heart of modern Europe'.⁸

⁸ Quote from the title of Hugh Seton-Watson, The "Sick Heart" of Modern Europe : The Problem of the Danubian Lands, (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1975).

III. A Distinct State Model

The communist state was a modern and totalitarian state at the same time: modern, because it ruled by centralised political power; totalitarian, because it aimed to exercise total control over its citizens. Modernity is itself associated with extended state powers. By its very nature the modern nation-state gives unique opportunities of control. As Giddens states, the development of totalitarianism has been made possible by the modern state, which offers excellent opportunities for economical, informational, political and military control: 'The modern world has been shaped through the intersection of capitalism, industrialism, nationalism and the nation-state system. . . . There are four 'institutional clusterings' associated with modernity: heightened surveillance, capitalistic enterprise, industrial production and the consolidation of centralised control of the means of violence.'⁹ Giddens points out that the modern state is monitored not only internally, by its citizens, but also externally, by the other states. The international aspect of state politics are not simply a stage where the respective actors perform but also a political regulator. In the age of modernity, the outside world observes the state and has the power to influence internal politics. The modern nation-state thus cannot function in isolation. Communism trapped itself in the conundrum of theoretically claiming to be aiming to become a universal form of government while at the same time practically cutting itself off from the rest of the world. The communist state aspired to a model of modernity in which a modernising state aims at total power but failed to accept a key component of modernity, being itself controlled.

⁹ Anthony Giddens, The Nation-state and Violence: Volume Two of Contemporary Critique of Historical Marxism, (University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1987), p. 5.

Giddens argues that the Gellnerian concept of nationalism is insufficient to explain modernity because it does not distinguish between the nation-state and nationalism. He insists that the question of why an industrialised society should be a nation-state remains unanswered.¹⁰ In the case of Bulgaria, the nation-state was adopted before industrialisation, but was also maintained after the communist modernisation. In other words, industrialisation on its own cannot explain the persistence of the nation-state. Giddens seeks to conceptualise nationalism separately from the nation-state. Nationalism, he claims, is primarily a psychological phenomenon, 'the affiliation of individuals to a set of symbols and beliefs emphasising communality among the members of a political order.'¹¹ This statement suggests that nationalism is primarily an emotional need of the modern man, whereas the nation-state is a rational construct of modernity.

Separating the world of politics from the realm of the modern mind seems behind the perception that communist ideas may be seen as something separate from the communist state. Communism was an emotional response to capitalism, whereas the communist state was an attempt to rationalise the capitalist state, and therefore failed. Such is the thinking behind the continuing attempts by hard-liners throughout the Eastern European countries to sustain communist parties after the fall of communism in 1989, striving to represent some kind of 'communism without communist politics'.

The main problem with the communist state from the point of view of modernity was that it tried to sustain itself without consent from the society it ruled. Communism believed that the state sits on top of society and directs it, but does not need to be approved by its members. As Schöpflin argues, communism perceived of the state as the

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 214.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 116.



flagship of advancement, whereas society was thought to be a backsliding unit. In the Western tradition, society was perceived as creative and progressive, and the state as restricting. As Schöpflin notes, for Eastern Europe, due to its particular historic and social development, modernity meant that the opposite became reality.¹² From here Schöpflin derives two main conclusions about communism and modernity: in Eastern Europe, there was 'a modernising revolution from above', while communism radically transformed this revolution with its own 'modernising objectives, myths and utopias'.¹³ Schöpflin also argues that communism aspired to modernise the world by changing the pattern of modernisation itself. It brought radical changes in economic structures and the relationship to property, and introduced rapid industrialisation to generally underdeveloped regions.¹⁴

Eastern European modernity was an interrupted and uneven process. The region experienced modernisation in its own way, while communism made further changes to the norms from the West. Communism therefore rested on the patterns of modernisation apparent in the West, and deviated from them. In effect, the communist state was constructed as a distinct model, and a deviation from the historical aspiration of Eastern Europe to a Western interpretation of modernity. Communism's concept of modernity rested on non-consensual political power. It failed to recognise that compelling support is much less efficient in building a modern state than consent. The communist concept of the state rested on two fundamentals: the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and the ideal of internationalism. Both intended to sustain the state's political power. But they said very little about the society within which the communist state was

¹² See Schöpflin, Politics in Eastern Europe, pp. 5-6.

¹³ Ibid. p. 37.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 14.

supposed to operate – apart from being constituted by class divisions, which had to be overcome. Communism implied that the dynamics of the state and society were simply a reflection of a one-way relationship between the ruler and the ruled. The most important state structure to be maintained was the state apparatus for controlling society. In theory communism denied the nation on its own as a possible foundation of the state. The communist state was a construct of political power only. But because communism performed as a changing system of meanings and practices, it used nationalism to try to connect to permanence. Because it had to square it with internationalism, nationalism under communism was generally perceived as a ‘false’ nationalism, as opposed to the ‘pure’ thing.

This study argues that communism in Eastern Europe was a particular historical period of the development of nationalism. It created a specific set of historical circumstances, which became of great importance to nationalism. Nationalism under communism became a very distinct form of political culture. This did not make it ‘less’ nationalistic but rather a particular type of nationalism. This also did not undermine its universal meaning. Communism formed a distinct type of nationalism, one which seemed always unsatisfied. And in Kampferer’s terms, each distinct case of nationalism makes the very nature of national identity universal.¹⁵ By using nationalism as an instrument of political power, communism underlined rather than weakened the idea that the modern world is a world ruled by nations and nationalism.

Smith’s theory of the origins of the nation offers a reconciliation of the universalistic and

¹⁵ See Bruce Kampferer, Legends of People: Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia, (Washington & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), p. 4.

historical approaches to nationalism. Smith believes that nationalism has many levels of development but that both the nation and nationalism are built upon more general and older concepts of community. For Smith, the very idea of the nation is based on the concept of ethnic community; the nation is constructed around an ethnic core.¹⁶ Smith relates the nation not only to culture but also to the political world, with its inevitable historical context. He suggests that understanding nationalism means understanding the origins of the nation. This, he insists, is rooted both in the mythical culture of the community and also in on-going interpretations throughout history. He examines the historical and political dynamism of nationalism within the framework of the permanency of the idea of the nation. Smith claims that the nation finds its political expression in the state, and that the consequent interaction between the nation and the state is very complex. Most importantly, he insists that the state is not simply the physical arena of the nation; state territory is not simply a location. The state, according to Smith, is a 'set of differentiated, autonomous and public institutions, which are territorially centralised and claim jurisdiction over a given territory, including the monopoly over coercion and extraction.'¹⁷ In this sense, the state reflects both the relationship between the rulers and the ruled and the deeper cultural traditions of the ethnic community. From this perspective, comprehending the communist state and its attitude towards the nation means looking simultaneously at historical circumstances and a society's cultural roots. Smith argues that in a centralised state the sense of political community is based primarily on shared and defended space. By defence he means not simply defence of territory from external excursions – physical and cultural – but also control over demographic movements, internal dissent, disruptive conflicts between elites or between the

¹⁶ Anthony Smith, National Identity, (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

¹⁷ Anthony Smith, 'State-Making and Nation-Building in States in History' in John A. Hall (ed.), States in History, (Oxford: Basic Blackwell, 1986), p.235.

countryside and the town.¹⁸

Smith also argues that all states are based on and relate to pre-existing national tradition, and that communism accepted this in practice, if not in theory: 'the Soviet experience suggests that even revolutionary "invented traditions" must harness or forge (often both) a national cultural and political identity if they are to strike deep popular roots.' This is why, he says, the Soviets tried to retain political control, but gave cultural autonomy to the different nationalities, as a way of acknowledging the validity of their national feelings.¹⁹ Thus according to Smith the communist state was a political expression of modernity, but constructed on pre-modern concepts.

¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 235-236.

¹⁹ Smith, National Identity, pp. 147-149.

IV. Marxism, Communism *and* Nationalism

In discussing communism and nationalism, other modern theories' starting point is Marxism rather than nationalism. Davis thinks that Marx and Engels views on nationalism were indeed determined by their concept of social class and that they should be criticised in the context of their time rather than in terms of the political and cultural structure of today's world. He underlines that this is not in order to justify them but rather to be fair towards their understanding of the subject.²⁰ He suggests that their views on problems of nations and nationalism as reflected in the theory of social classes are rather disappointing. Davis proposes instead to look at their views in the context of proletarian internationalism, because the proletariat 'mission in history', as seen by Marx and Engels, was to overthrow the bourgeoisie and establish proletarian internationalism. This, Davis states, means that Marxism professed that in the long-term the proletariat would be not nationalist but internationalist.²¹ He lists four main points, which have to be taken into account when analysing Marx and Engels' concept of proletarian internationalism: 1) internationalism is not cosmopolitan as it is based on nations, 2) 'much depends on the timing and sequence of events' as Marx and Engels believed in the development of socialism after capitalism, 3) 'internationalism did not necessarily imply national equality' and Marx and Engels favoured larger states against smaller, and 4) internationalism, as conceptualised by Marx and Engels, was an internationalism of advanced industrial nations.²² Davis concludes that in Marx and Engels' theory nationalism was not among the founding principles of their policies and therefore it

²⁰ See Horace B. Davis, Nationalism & Socialism: Marxism and Labor Theories of Nationalism to 1917, (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1967), p. 73.

²¹ Ibid., p. 74-75.

²² Ibid., pp. 13-14.

could be sacrificed in the 'interests of the larger policy': 'Proletarian internationalism was a system in which such words as freedom, equality, democracy, justice and morality would have real meaning for the working man. But devoid of socialist content these 'eternal principles' were a sham and a delusion.'²³

Similarly Light thinks that Marx and Engels developed far from a full theory of nationalism. But she also argues that despite this they had ideas which served as a basis for the further development of the Soviet theory of internationalism and particularly of Lenin's views on the topic. Light thinks that Marx and Engels were restricted in their views on questions of nationalism as far as they were to be found in their treatment of life in the colonies, which was 'typical for Europeans of the nineteenth century', but could not be applied unconditionally to other parts of the world.²⁴ In the context of the colonial questions discussed by Marx and Engels, 'nationalism engendered in colonialism should be supported not for its own sake but because it would bring about colonial revolutions.'²⁵ According to Light this was the essential thought which reflected in Leninist interpretations of nationalism - that nationalism should be considered only in relation to other forces in society. In this way Marxism offered an understanding of nationalism as a function of other social forces rather than as a totalising ideology. According to Light the focus of Marx and Engels' theory of nations and nationalism was on nationalism only in relation to the revolutionary aims of the proletariat.

Light's argument about nationalism being subordinated to the purposes of the

²³ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁴ See Margot Light, The Soviet Theory of International Relations, (Great Britain: Wheatsheaf Books Ltd., 1988), pp. 75-76.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 79.

communist revolution seems central to understanding why communism resorted to usage of nationalism: if nationalism was working in accord with the revolution then it should be supported because it ‘furthers the aims of the revolution’. Thus in Marxist terms communism saw nationalism as an ‘auxiliary force’ in bringing about a socialist revolution.²⁶

Similarly Stern argues that in understanding ‘the Marxist base’ of the interaction between communism and nationalism one has to take into account the time when Marx matured as a political philosopher, as well as other thinkers he was influenced by. Stern pays particular attention to the social conditions he lived in his native Germany and his acquaintance with the history of communist and socialist thought, which Marx himself referred to as ‘utopian’. He emphasises Hegel’s influence on Marx and particularly the ‘all-encompassing nature of the Hegelian approach’ as well as the idea of progress as the bearer of dynamism in history and theory of humankind.²⁷ By outlining where Marx departed from a Hegelian approach, Stern underlines that central to Marxist theory came the idea that the dialectical conflict in history was not one of abstractions, as in Hegel, but one of material factors. Yet Stern immediately warns that Marx did more than just formulate a ‘somewhat esoteric “materialist conception” of history’, which others have dubbed ‘historical materialism’: ‘Hegel has posited ideas, philosophies, cultures and moralities as things-in-themselves; Marx saw them as human creations, subject to change as material circumstances change perceptions of interests and needs.’²⁸ Stern points out that Marx would have had a much smaller impact on the world if he had adhered to a

²⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁷ Geoffrey Stern, The Rise and Decline of International Communism, (England: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 1990), p. 10.

²⁸ Ibid., p.11.

materialist reductionist view of the content of history.

This insight into Marx's philosophy helps explain that what Marx meant when he talked about society was society as a whole rather than national societies. He discussed 'any national references serving merely to illustrate the general pattern of socio-economic organisation in a given historical epoch.'²⁹ Thus Marx offered an understanding of national phenomenon as a stage or a form of development, which was subject to change. As much as it was about difference it was also about being a part of the wholeness of humanity. In another words it was not that Marx failed to comprehend that there were nations and nationalism in the world but he conceptualised them as stages of human development rather than fixed entities.

Nimni also disputes claims that Marx and Engels had no theory on national questions. He believes that in fact they had a theory, though it was not to be found in a 'single corpus of literature that presents their theories in an unequivocal manner'.³⁰ Similarly to Stern he asserts that the starting point for understanding Marx's views on nationalism is looking at national development within his universal approach, but at the same time locating it historically. Further on Nimni emphasises Marx's understanding of national communities as stages of development of productive forces.³¹ He also sees the term 'nation' as used by Marx and Engels embodied in its English and French meaning which designates a permanent population of a nation-state whereas the word nationality was used in its Central and Eastern European denotation, meaning an ethno-cultural

²⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁰ Ephraim Nimni, Marxism and Nationalism: Theoretical Origins of a Political Crisis, (London, Concord, Mass: Pluto Press), 1991, p. 17.

³¹ Ibid., p.17.

community which does not have full national status because it lacked a state on its own: 'Consequently, modern nations were for Marx and Engels what we may call today nation states; ethno-cultural and linguistic communities with their own states.'³²

Further on Nimni clarifies that nation in Marxist terms means a 'mechanism for consolidating and securing the conditions of existing bourgeoisie.' The Marxist concept of nationalism is thus to be found in the dynamic which leads the nation to form its own state to further the development of its bourgeoisie. From here, according to Nimni, stems Marx's idea that some nations could form national states and other could not.'³³ Nimni asserts that later on Lenin developed his own theory of nationalism which was based on Marxist premises but essentially was determined by his own understanding of the problem. Marxist-Leninist views in relation to national questions, asserts Nimni, were connected to 'the debilitating impact of class reductionism.'³⁴ He believes that Lenin, not Marx, undermined the role of national culture by locating national identities mostly within the field of class determination and describing them as political forces only. This was illustrated in Lenin's theory of self-determination, which holds that the awakening of national identity was 'mere reaction to national oppression'. Nimni believes that Lenin underestimated the 'cultural and ethnic dimensions of the national question', particularly when it came to the non-Russian nationalities in the USSR. Therefore Nimni thinks that there was a major failure not in Marx and Engels' views but in what became known as the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, which refused to recognise precisely those aspects of classical Marxism which could have provided insight into culture and ethnicity.'³⁵

³² Ibid., p. 23.

³³ Ibid., p. 42.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 90.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 89-95. Here Nimni has in mind mainly Marxist-Leninist thinking which

Cummins also argues that much of what has been labelled as Marxist opinions are actually views which Marx himself disagreed with. He asserts that although Marx and Engels did not develop a general theory of nations and nationalism they were compelled to pay attention to various forms of national questions and deal with the relationship they had with class struggles. In another words, Marxism had a theory of national questions developed as a flexible strategy, which took into account the peculiarities of the world.³⁶ At the same time he acknowledges that it drew from their knowledge and experience, which was confined to the western world and believed that in general 'the development of national states was closely linked with their levels of economic development'.³⁷ Marx and Engels, argues Cummins, were interested in nationalism 'in the hope of harnessing it, however temporarily, to their overall purpose'. In their pursuit for recruiting allies for the purposes of the proletarian revolution, Marx and Engels viewed nationalism as a development with its own peculiarities in each society.³⁸

However he also accepts that Marx and Engels were Eurocentrics who viewed that some European societies had a particular dynamic as opposed to the static and unchanging character of some non-European societies. The western societies in Europe, they suggested, had a capacity for universalisation, which made them distinct.³⁹ In this context, asserts Cummins, Marx and Engels' analysis of Russia presented them with a peculiar problem, for when it came to Russia, both Marx and Engels deviated from their

refused to deal with the theory of Otto Bauer proposing a different reading of Marx.

³⁶ Ian Cummins, Marx, Engels and National Movements, (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1980), p. 11-12.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁸ Ibid., p.50.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

usual way of thinking as historical materialists: 'Instead of economic factors, the forces which Marx stressed as principally affecting Russia's development lay in the essentially superstructural realm of politics.' The idea that there were two Russia's, one 'official' (the privileged classes) and one 'unofficial' (the common people, or *narod*) led them to the belief that there were virtually two societies within Russia. Marx and Engels were generally convinced that Russia was an 'inherently expansionist power' and were particularly concerned about the extent of Russian influence in Germany.⁴⁰ Cummins also points out that in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx argued that Russia was a peculiar case and may develop its own 'exceptional path of development'.⁴¹ Cummins underlines that in the case of Russia Marx gave his support to those who aspired to conspiratorial tactics to seize power rather than to those who advocated socio-economic change and the achievement of 'objective conditions' and the growth of class consciousness. He thus concludes that Marx and Engels showed sympathy with those groups in Russia who aimed to overthrow the autocracy and by the irony of history, when Lenin appeared on the stage as a revolutionary practitioner, 'the task of modifying theory to facilitate practice had, to some extent, already been forced on Marx and Engels in their approach to Russian problems'.⁴²

Cummins concludes that despite their general outlook of Eurocentrism, their strategic arguments were more flexible. And although Marx emphasised the economic factors in producing historical change, he nevertheless gave priority to political factors: 'In short, Marx remained true to his eleventh thesis of Feurbach: at the cultural level he sought to

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 125 and p.131.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 137.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 155-163. Cummins believes that in the case of Russia Marx and Engels made tactical alliances with national movements (with the *Narodnaya Volya* movement in

understand the world; his strategy, however, was shaped by his concern to change it.⁴³

Benner also argues that Marx and Engels' views on nations and nationalism were closely linked to political factors. She asserts that the most interesting aspect of Marx and Engels' analysis of nations and nationalism is that they defined them not in 'isolation from other aspects of social life, but within specific historical and social contexts.'⁴⁴ She argues that Marx and Engels did not understand nations and nationalism in purely economic terms and did not suggest the dissolution of nations with the development of the world market.⁴⁵ Instead she asserts: 'Marx and Engels' conception of nations was, to be sure, mainly a political one.'⁴⁶ She thinks that they recognised the pre-political forms of ethnicity and linguistic community as well as territorial attachments as 'unthreatening' to the proletarian revolution as long as these were not mobilised in support of authoritarian states.⁴⁷ Benner outlines four main tenets of Marx and Engels' understanding of nations and nationalism: 1) the political or cultural nation is not to be separated from its social bases, 2) nationalism cannot be analysed as '*sui generis*', but in relation to movements linked to class issues, 3) the international aspects of nationalism are also related to class conflicts, and 4) the appeal of nationalism is not in the primordial national identity but rather in the political importance it acquires in class-divided societies, which Marx and Engels observed.⁴⁸ She suggests that Marx and Engels'

particular) in their search to facilitate the proletarian revolution.

⁴³ Ibid., p.180.

⁴⁴ Erica Benner, Really Existing Nationalisms: A Post-Communist View from Marx and Engels, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p.13.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 96-98.

understanding of identities and conflict is to be found in the concept of internationalism. Accordingly the internationalist strategy they proposed would reconcile desires for national freedom with the requirements of a worldwide outlook. Benner concludes that Marx and Engel's views offer an alternative to the national-determinist view, which assumes that nationalism carries a 'trans-national appeal for all members of national society'. Instead, she argues, Marx and Engels drew attention to the 'specific interests, threats, and deprivations that induce people to embrace extremist nationalism.'⁴⁹ Discussing nationalism and communism from this perspective proves to be illuminating when analysing why and how communists themselves 'embraced' nationalism in Eastern Europe.

Kemp focuses on Marx and Engels' views on nationalism as dynamic, moving from the abstract to the concrete depending on the political circumstances they were interested in. He believes that although nationalism as such was not their primary issue of concern, Marx and Engels pointed to the power of nationalism as a part of a social revolution, which would overthrow the existing order. Kemp underlines that Marx and Engels viewed that nationalism was a tool which should be used to further proletarian internationalism.⁵⁰ He also believes that this understanding of nationalism set up a pattern of 'using' and 'misusing' nationalism followed by many of their disciples.⁵¹ Kemp also thinks that in difference to many of his followers Marx did not believe in 'revolution in one country' for he did not recognise that there may be 'history in one country'.⁵² Marx and Engels had their own political and national prejudices as illustrated by their

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 234.

⁵⁰ Walter A. Kemp, Nationalism and Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union: A Basic Contradiction?, (Great Britain: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1990), p. 26.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 32.

views of the future of the 'Southern Slavs' as 'historyless people' who could achieve worth only if they supported a European revolution. But even then they could not form a viable economic unit, which was a prerequisite for a political unit.⁵³ Kemp points to the 'gross misreading' of theory of the fathers of communism regarding pan-Slavism as 'the centre of their offensive force - Russia.' As a result of this 'misreading' Eastern European nationalism was viewed with great suspicion in the communist movement.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid., p. 22.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

V. Multilingualism without Nations

One of the areas where communist interaction with nationalism was most visible was language education. Communism declared itself to be a grand project, which would deliver mass literacy and education for everyone. These objectives determined the particular relationship communism had to have with language. The only condition was that the content of the education must reflect communist principles. The complications arose when the theory had to be applied in practice. The language issue was particularly difficult to tackle because each communist country of Eastern Europe contained more than one linguistic community. Theoretically all nationalities were entitled to education in their respective language as long as the education maintained a communist content. Communism thus envisioned multilingualism which does not express national differences but rather common affiliation to communism. It attempted to disconnect language from national identity in Eastern Europe, although language (alongside religion) has been traditionally seen as one of the most important features of national identity.

Most modernists agree that when discussing areas outside Eastern Europe language is an important but not the most important feature of the nation.⁵⁵ Smith's definition of the fundamentals of national identity does not include language as such. Yet it is assumed that features which he does consider essential, such as mass culture, common myths and historical memories, are in general expressed in a common language. Yet in terms of Eastern Europe, Smith asserts that language is one of the most important features of national identity. He points out the central role played by philologists and folklorists in Eastern European national cultures. In Eastern Europe, he suggests, language is an ethnic marker of the nation, which overrides the importance of the civic elements of

national identity.⁵⁶ Schöpflin also argues that precisely because language is not a self-evident marker in south-eastern Europe, with its high level of ethnic mixing, it became one of the very individual features of national identity in the region.⁵⁷ Far from being simply a linguistic mode of communication, language has been perceived as a powerful identifier of nationality.

Communism tried to break language away from this role. It declared that communist, not national, identity, should be rendered by national languages. Marxism-Leninism had to be disseminated in as many languages as possible. Thus instead of enforcing national differences, language diversity would promote internationalism, and remove national barriers. At the same time, the very concept of mass education enhanced the significance of language. As Armstrong asserts, it was precisely the idea of mass education which transformed language from a symbol of ethnic identity into its primary criterion.⁵⁸ Again, communism had little understanding of the role language had played in the history of Eastern European societies, as well as how mass education could change this. As a result, the communist language project failed to create the multilingual yet non-national society it promised. Education under communism began as a multilingual project. But as its attempt to separate language from national identity failed, it moved towards a policy of linguistic homogenisation.

⁵⁵ See Elie Kedourie, Nationalism, (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1993).

⁵⁶ Smith, National Identity, pp. 12-14.

⁵⁷ George Schöpflin, 'Ethnic Minorities in South-Eastern Europe: Analysis and Solutions in Post-Communist Transition and European Integration Process'. Paper. Second Summer School, Cervia-Italy, Longo Editore Ravenna, 1996, first unit: vol. 1.

⁵⁸ John A. Armstrong, Nations before Nationalism, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 279-281.

Bulgaria under communism was a good example. Until the campaign to 're-name' Bulgarian Turks in 1984-85, the official language policy of the BCP followed the Soviet line of state-controlled education, and language provisions for all minorities. Yet the party saw the tendency of language education to maintain ethnic differences as undesirable, and it set out to marginalise minority languages. Each ethnic community had different experiences under the communist system of language education. Yet in general, the practice of any non-Bulgarian language was perceived as a potential threat to national security. By the mid-1970s, little remained of the original communist idea of international multilingualism. The two main languages of education were Bulgarian and Russian: the first was the language of the ethnic majority of the country, the second was the language of Soviet dominance.

It may be wrong to suggest that the communist design for language education was a complete failure. Seton-Watson states that, conceptually, the Soviet system, which was the main model of language education under communism, represented a kind of success if compared to the minority language provisions in Eastern Europe before the Second World War.⁵⁹ He also insists that in its early years, communism was better equipped for multilingual education because internationalism had a stronger appeal after the war. Some minority cultures did advance educationally under communism. For instance, the 1950s marked the high-point for Turkish education in Bulgaria. Although Yugoslavia should be viewed as a special case, the Macedonian language was promoted as a national language in 1945.

⁵⁹ Hugh Seton-Watson, Eastern Europe between the Wars 1918-1941, (Cambridge University Press: 1946), p. 272.

Yet real communist achievements in education remain debatable. The problem is not so much the degree of success of the communist policy, but its inconsistency. Changes in language education were determined by the communist leadership and its varying policy on national questions, not by linguistic reality. The unintended result was that instead of diminishing people's awareness of language as an ethnic marker in Bulgaria, communism emphasised it. Those who call themselves Bulgarians, it was firmly understood, must speak Bulgarian. The impression was that nothing had changed from the inter-war years, when a big effort was made to homogenise the country linguistically. The difference was that Bulgarian communism declared in its documents that it would deliver equal linguistic rights for all citizens. In reality, it aspired to linguistic homogeneity. In this way communism confirmed language as one of the most persistent features of modern Bulgarian identity. Most importantly, the policy was unstated, making it seem as if the Bulgarian language had a divine right to be the only national language. This encouraged the understanding that Bulgarian was the language of cultural advancement, whereas ethnic minorities' languages were to disappear in the process of communist modernisation.

VI. Communism and Ethnic Conflict

Understanding ethnic conflict is key to analysing the role of nationalism under communism. Communism claimed that in the socialist society there were no antagonistic ethnic conflicts. Communist society in general aimed to become a conflict-free society. Conflicts were seen as deriving from class, and the communist revolution was supposed to resolve them all. Communism professed to eliminate ethnic conflict by committing everyone to the overarching concept of social equality. But there was also the idea that all conflicts, including ethnic conflicts, were to be eliminated by the communist revolution, rather than negotiated. In practice communism preferred to mask, ignore, undermine or dismiss ethnic conflict. If communism was free of disagreement, then ethnic conflict simply could not be acknowledged.

One of the ways to avoid discussion of ethnic conflict under communism was to present it as a question of the status of minorities. In most communist countries of Eastern Europe, minorities officially enjoyed all freedoms: language education, religious practice, customs, independent institutions. The only condition attached to all such provisions was that people of different nationalities were committed to the communist state. The lack of common state loyalty among the different nationalities was not a problem of the communist state exclusively, but a persistent source of difficulty throughout the history of Eastern Europe. Such difficulties have been explained mainly as 'bad government'. No human rights were observed and protection for minorities was almost non-existent.⁽⁴⁾ Indeed the communist state attempted to break through the 'bad' state tradition by bringing into life a new singleness of purpose under which all nationalities could unite. What communism offered in theory was a utopian world where everyone was promised

equal protection by the state. But in practice the priority of communist governments was the defence of their own rule of the nation-state, not citizens' rights.

Ethnic conflict under communism has been largely discussed as a question of communist party policy on national questions. This was the primary source of understanding of ethnicity under communism. This study looks into the very nature of ethnic conflict and argues that ethnic conflict under communism derived from communism promoting ethnic exclusivity. Three main works in the area of ethnic conflict provide the theoretical background for the study of communism and ethnic conflict in Bulgaria. McGarry and O'Leary's taxonomy of ethnic conflict, which uses experience from around the world, states that there are two main ways of dealing with ethnic conflict: manage it or eliminate it. Methods of elimination include genocide, mass population transfers or partition/secession. Management means broadly speaking different types of federalism or hegemonic control.⁶¹ McGarry and O'Leary argue that post-revolutionary communism was dedicated to transcending ethnic identities and merging them into a communist identity. When this vision was exhausted, communist parties focused on suppressing the 'politicisation of ethnic differences'. In short, communism failed to sustain its founding idea that there could be a communist society with no national antagonisms. Instead it focused on controlling ethnic politics. This was done mainly through hegemonic control, defined as 'coercive and/or co-optive rule which successfully manages to make unworkable an ethnic challenge to the state order.'⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 272-275.

⁶¹ John McGarry & Brandan O'Leary (eds.), The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation: Case Studies of Protracted Ethnic Conflicts, (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 4.

Research on ethnic conflict in Bulgaria illustrates that both elimination of ethnic conflict and managing it through hegemonic control were widely practised under communism. In the case of the Turkish minority, for example, the Bulgarian government used three methods of eliminating ethnic conflict: a) negotiated emigration, b) forced mass population transfer and c) forced assimilation. The Jewish problem in Bulgaria after the end of the Second World War was also by and large settled through methods of elimination - namely, mass resettlement and assimilation. The Macedonian question presented the most confusing case in deciding which method to apply because of the historical complexities. Communists saw the best solution as denying its mere existence, but in practical terms, both hegemonic control and unofficial Soviet arbitration were applied.

The whole structure of the communist state as a one-party regime made it impossible for minorities to participate in political power. Minorities could participate in political life only in the role of communists. But they were not only underrepresented in the ranks of the ruling communist party, but also normally asked to declare exclusive loyalty to the party - denying ethnic identity. Minorities were represented in the leadership only if they had no obvious intention of changing the minorities policy prescribed by the party.

Lustick also conceptualises the idea of hegemonic control. He argues that hegemonic control is an effective way of managing ethnic conflict because it is based not only on coercion or the threat of coercion, but also on a 'wide range of political and economic mechanisms, institutional arrangements, legal frameworks and socio-cultural circumstances'.⁶³ Lustick elaborates on the idea of controlling minorities through co-

⁶² Ibid., p. 23.

⁶³ Ian Lustick, Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority, (Austin

optation and subordination complemented by strategies for depriving them of the means for united political action.

It is difficult to assess to what extent minorities in Bulgaria were exclusively denied access to independent sources of economic support, because the BCP used these policies towards the entire population. For instance, police surveillance was applied to all citizens regardless of their ethnic background although ethnic groups were subjected to particular scrutiny. However the level of co-optation - defined by Lustick as offers of side payments or favours to members of ethnic groups in return for information - was quite high in the Turkish and Jewish community, particularly in times of crisis.⁶⁴

The main question in this study is what made ethnic minorities susceptible to hegemonic control under communism? In the case of the Bulgarian Muslims, the lack of an established urban elite, economic dependence on the majority and isolation from the kin-state made them very vulnerable. The destruction of Jewish cultural institutions, politicised relations with Israel and the small size of the community made Bulgarian Jews also quite open to communist control. Additionally, segmentation, segregation, isolation and economic dependence on the majority left all minorities completely unprotected in

& London: University of Texas Press, 1980), p. 78.

⁶⁴ This conclusion is based on the evidence provided by 11 interviews conducted in Bulgaria during 1996-97 with Ottoman scholars, former students of Turkish Philology, Turkish party activists and members of the Sofia and Russe Jewish communities. Some of them shared the anxiety about the lustration process, which could expose them as collaborators of the communist regime because of the job and career offers as well as side payments offered to them during the anti-Turkish campaign of 1984-85 and during the very last months of the communism in 1989.

Bulgaria under communism. Thus through its controlling policies, the Bulgarian communist state emphasised ethnic divisions instead of creating shared loyalty.

Kymlicka regards this lack of common loyalty as communism's biggest failure. He argues that the inability to create 'integrative citizenship' for all nationalities was the most significant consequence of living under communism, resulting in the so-called 'ethnic revival' during the last years of communism.⁶⁵ Kymlicka's 'liberal theory' of minority rights asserts that ethnic conflict could be resolved successfully in the long term only through consensus. But communist regimes did not rule through consensus. They offered communist identity as a mechanism to deal with ethnic issues, but it was very weak and could not integrate citizens – not always because they did not want to but because they were not allowed to. The multinational communist states could survive only if the various national groups felt allegiance to the state they cohabited, yet communism offered no consensual means through which to achieve this.⁶⁶

The lack of clear communist theory of minorities' rights in the communist nation-state isolated minorities' issues as something separate from questions of the communist state. This only reinforced ethnic boundaries. The denial of ethnicity encouraged the understanding that differences are not negotiable. From this perspective communism could be seen as a continuation of the inter-war political tradition in Eastern Europe, with very little experience of democratic discussion, and very problematic observance of human or minority rights.

⁶⁵ Will Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 67.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

VII. Bulgaria and the Soviet Connection

Bulgarian communism maintained a unique relationship with the Soviet regime. During its entire period in power, from 1944 until the very end in 1989, Bulgarian communists registered their untiring loyalty to the Soviets. But what made Bulgaria unusual under communism was not simply the existence of this connection. What was really unique was that the attachment to Soviet-style communism did not work against Bulgarian national aspirations. The satellite position of Bulgaria facilitated not merely the development of Bulgarian communism but also the advancement and consolidation of Bulgarian nationalism. The Sovietisation of Bulgaria was far less threatening to the Bulgarian nation than its own internal ethnic diversity. The main reason was that communism promoted the old idea of the Bulgarian nation as an integral part of the Slavic world. This concept was centred around Russia, Bulgaria's traditional protector. The Soviet Union was perceived as a Russian creation, and communism as the mainly Russian interpretation of Marxism.

Bulgarian communism came to power with the decisive help of the Soviets at the end of the Second World War. Throughout the war, Bulgaria sided with Germany, and effectively against the USSR.⁶⁷ Bulgaria was seriously weakened by the war and the short term gains of Macedonia and Thrace, which Bulgarian troops occupied, were lost. The Red Army remained in Bulgaria from 1944 until 1947 - a great advantage to the communists, who established themselves as rulers during this period.⁶⁸ The particular history of the coming to power of the Bulgarian communists explains much about how

⁶⁷ See Richard J. Crampton, A Short History of Modern Bulgaria, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 124-135.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 145.

they ruled, as most analysts agree. Rothschild argues that two main factors determined the communist victory throughout Eastern Europe: political structures already weakened by the war, and Soviet intervention. Both greatly facilitated the communist take-over everywhere. Rothschild suggests that in all countries, except Yugoslavia and Albania, communists were able to subvert the existing political coalitions from within, and eventually destroy them. Bulgaria seems a perfect example of this model. The BCP was a Leninist party and its members, according to Rothschild, 'played a role out of all proportion to their members in the international Communist movement. . . . Language, sentiment, irredentism, and the tradition, established by Blagoev and his colleagues, of peculiarly close relations between the Bulgarian and Russian Marxist movements, explain this unique thrust reposed in the Bulgarian Communists by the Russian leaders. Among the most backward of European countries, Bulgaria produced international Communist's best Bolsheviks.'⁶⁹ Bulgarian communists were installed in power in 1944, Rothschild concludes, by the 'relentless Grandfather Ivan – Russia.'⁷⁰ Rothschild disagrees that Bulgaria was culturally conditioned to servility or the historical sentimentality of the small country to the big one: 'Rather, Communist Bulgaria's sustained allegiance to the Soviet Union reflected a real complementarity of economic interests and developmental strategies.'⁷¹ The post-war situation in the country was desperate, all non-communist political parties split on collaborators and opposition and therefore became dysfunctional.⁷² The retribution of the Bulgarian communists against their political rivals was particularly savage: 'thousands of old scores were settled, and the proportion of the

⁶⁹ Joseph Rothschild, The Communist Party of Bulgaria: Origins and Development, 1883-1936, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 300-301.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 303

⁷¹ Joseph Rothschild, Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II, (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 212.

⁷² Ibid., p. 123.

population executed was higher than in any other former Axis state.⁷³ The BCP legitimated its actions by allegiance to the Soviets, which was also declared to be the only guarantee for stability. Rothschild argues that what made Bulgaria unique in relation to the Soviet factor was not so much the satellite position assumed by the post-war Bulgarian state, but the relatively popular support this position enjoyed. He suggests that apart from the special relationship between the Bulgarian and the Soviet communists, there was also the traditional attachment of the Bulgarian peasantry to everything Russian, which was extended to 'a considerable degree of toleration, if not support, which the Bulgarian masses extended to the Communists.'

Bell also thinks that Bulgaria was distinguished from the rest of Eastern Europe by its strong pro-Soviet position.⁷⁴ But he underlines that Soviet domination was seen as a protector of Bulgarian national interests, not simply as an interventionist power.

Supporting this view, Lendvai argues that the pro-Soviet policy in Bulgaria was not so much directed against Bulgarian nationalism but rather against co-operation with the rest of the Eastern European and particularly the Balkan states. He focuses on nationalism in Eastern Europe under Soviet rule from the point of view of the inter-bloc relations, rather than the individual relationship of each country to the USSR.⁷⁵ This seems particularly true of Bulgaria, which under communism had problematic relations with all of its neighbouring countries in relation to national questions.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 70.

⁷⁴ John D. Bell, Peasants in Power: Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian National Union, 1899-1923, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 143.

⁷⁵ See Paul Lendvai, Eagles in Cobwebs: Nationalism and Communism in the Balkans (London: Macdonald, 1970), p. XII.

But the supreme importance of the Soviets to Bulgarian politics was not solely due to communism. Because of the particular way in which the USSR was russified, communist Bulgaria could relate to the Soviets just as pre-communist Bulgarian bonded to Russia.⁷⁶ This was particularly true of the peasantry and the intelligentsia, which had a long tradition of being attached to things Russian.⁷⁷ Bulgaria was connected to Russia in a very special way historically and culturally. The linguistic similarity and the common religion are the two most important factors in this respect. This is why the Soviet presence was seen by and large as a corrector of national sovereignty, not as a real threat to the Bulgarian nation. Bulgarian communism had the great advantage of being able to draw support from the pre-communist tradition without the risk of being seen as anti-Soviet.

⁷⁶ See Richard Pipes, Russia under the Bolshevik Regime, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

⁷⁷ See Boian Penev, 'Nashata Inteligentsia: Fragmenti' in Zashto sme takiva, Ivan Elenkov & Rumén Daskalov (eds.), (Sofia: Izdatelstvo Prosveta, 1994), pp. 131-143.

VIII. The Bulgarian Countryside Misplaced

Communism proposed a totally new political and social system in Bulgaria. In a country where the majority of the population were peasants, it declared that the working class was the carer of economic and social progress. The peasantry was supposed to be integrated into the working class under the slogan of workers-peasants alliance. The countryside was supposed to be merged with the urban areas as much as possible. The new identity on offer to the Bulgarians was supposed to have a strong proletarian profile, which was to be built upon the existing social fragmentation, which characterised much of Bulgarian life after the Second World War. This was the objective of communist transformation of the Bulgarian countryside.

The main difficulty the ruling communist party faced was how to crush the agrarian opposition. This required changing the political balance because as Crampton argues the most important factor in peasants politics after the war was that the agrarian parties were the most serious domestic opponents of the communist regime in Bulgaria. The BCP knew that there was a deep suspicion towards the new regime on behalf of the peasant population. First of all it had to subvert the existing agrarian parties. Bulgarian communists led a fierce battle with them and the main political leader of the agrarians in the immediate aftermath of the war, Nikola Petkov, who was sentenced to death after a show-trial in 1947.⁷⁸ Shortly afterwards the agrarians were fused with the Fatherland Front, which was the political organisation subsuming all political parties under the command of the communists. The new official puppet agrarian party, the Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union, was created by the BCP and this was the most effective way of subjecting the countryside to the communist leadership.

During the 1950s the BCP, under the leadership of Vulko Chervenkov, carried out the systematic collectivisation of the land. Private land-holding was virtually destroyed and the entire village structure was changed. The Soviet model was applied and the industrialisation was the first priority for the Bulgarian regime: 'In essence, the general line adopted by Chervenkov provided that the Bulgarian countryside become in effect, Bulgaria's internal colony, which was to be squeezed and exploited on behalf of urbanisation and industrialisation.'⁷⁹ The main result of this policy was that the traditional suspicion of the countryside towards the urban culture deepened. Peasants perceived of the communist regime as an urban feature, which was imposed on their life. Destroying the agrarian parties and burdening the peasantry with the demand to generate profit for the building up of the industrial sector could hardly win the support of the countryside for communism. The communist project intruded into the very heart of the Bulgarian countryside. The Bulgarian peasantry, which was one of the most egalitarian societies in Eastern Europe, was politically and socially disorientated. Communism not only dispossessed the peasants but also destroyed their political identity. On the other hand the communist plan for the modernisation of the countryside offered one important benefit to village people, upward mobility. Many of the younger generation could leave the villages and go to the towns, where employment in the factories was available. It also offered cultural interaction with the dynamics of the city. The resettlement to the towns and the simultaneous partial urbanisation of the villages gave the peasants access to information, which previously had been very minimal.

⁷⁸ See Crampton, *A Short History*, pp. 150-157.

⁷⁹ Nissan Oren, *Revolution Administered: Agrarianism and Communism in Bulgaria*, (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins Press, 1973), p. 115.

Yet the communist modernisation of the village remained a halfway modernisation. While working in the town, peasants maintained their connection to the village. Although life in the towns seemed more comfortable, it was felt that peasants were pushed to move there rather than having made the choice themselves. Their urbanisation was not voluntary. Many of the new town dwellers acquired the mentality of an exile or guest-arbiter; they became what Laba calls in the Polish context 'peasant-workers'.⁸⁰ While working in the town, peasants glorified the countryside; when back in the village, praised the benefits of modernity. Thus Bulgarian peasants became the largest category of misplaced citizens under communism. Very importantly, along with the upward mobility communism offered among other things the opportunity to join the Bulgarian Communist Party. Many of the young generation of Bulgarian communists came from the villages or small towns in the countryside. These recent urbanites, holders of the 'red-diploma', reflected the confusions of the communist countryside.⁸¹ On one hand they identified with the newly acquired power of the city and on the other they remained strongly attached to their rural past. As communist state servants they glorified the city where the party gave them the opportunity to study and make a career. They felt grateful to the party for the education and a career it gave them. As a result many of them dismissed peasant culture as inferior and others idealised rural life. Rothschild pinpoints this particular conflict within the communist generation: 'The intelligentsia despised the peasantry from which it sprang and scorned any occupation other than state service or politics, which became one of Bulgaria's leading industries.'⁸²

⁸⁰ Roman Laba, The Roots of Solidarity : a Political Sociology of Poland's Working-class Democratization, (Princeton, N.J : Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 115-116.

⁸¹ See Rothschild, The Communist Party of Bulgaria, p. 224.

⁸² Ibid., p. 225

In terms of politics communist modernisation subjected the countryside to the city. All decisions about life in the village came from the nearest party district headquarters in the town. The Bulgarian peasantry, which before communism had its own political life and consciousness, lost all confidence to communicate politics. Peasants' political passivity mixed with messianic thinking and communism was accepted more or less as a given. Bulgarian peasantry did not gain much from the chaotic changes in communist agricultural policy. After the failure in 1959-60 of the so-called 'great leap forward' came ideas of 'planning from below', the 'perfection of centralised planning', and the building-up of the big agrarian-industrial complexes during the 1960s as well as during the New Economic Mechanism introduced in the 1980s.⁸³ Crampton argues that despite all attempts to integrate agriculture with industry, the Bulgarian peasant remained devoted to the small individual plot of land. Indeed the permission to work on private plot, which was part of the parcel called 'household self-sufficiency', by the beginning of the 1980s proved to be the most efficient way of farming in Bulgaria.

However the disillusionment with communist modernisation was large. The countryside remained deeply conservative and untouched by the voices of dissent which became apparent in the last decades of communist rule. The communist era, which failed to modernise the peasantry labelled it as naïve and laughable. The urbanites used the word 'peasant' (*selianin*, *seliak*) pejoratively and often blamed the countryside for the poor economic performance of communist Bulgaria and its cultural conservatism. Yet at the same time the very same backwardness of the countryside became a source of its romanticisation. The isolation of village life became a symbol of Bulgarian national

⁸³ For detailed account of the economic reforms in Bulgaria see Crampton, A Short History, pp. 192-200, and James F. Brown, Bulgaria Under Communist Rule, (London: Pall Mall Press, 1970), pp. 83- 95.

purity, untouched by civilisation. Communist intellectuals endowed the countryside with mythical qualities and looked there for inspiration.⁸⁴ From the 1960s, folklore studies, ethnography and dialectology were greatly encouraged in Bulgarian universities. The subjects were united under the titles of *narodovedchestvo* ('study of the people') or *narodopsichologia* ('people's psychology').⁸⁵ The Institute of Folklore at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences promoted the study of micro-regional culture, *kraeznanie*, which saw Bulgarian culture as consisting of small units, each declared a repository of ancient mythology.⁸⁶ The aim was to emphasise the antiquity of the Bulgarian countryside as the heart of the Bulgarian nation. 'Imagining' the countryside as a nation, in Anderson's sense, did not compensate for the failures of Bulgarian communism in its agricultural policy. But it did help the BCP to credit itself as being the party of the Bulgarian people.

⁸⁴ See Nikolai Haitov, *Divi Razkazi*, (Plovdiv: Hristo G. Danov, 1967) and Iordan Radichkov, *Luda Treva*, (Varna: Georgi Bakalov, 1980). Both authors enjoyed wide recognition and popularity among the Bulgarian intelligentsia. They mythologised the Bulgarian village as highly imaginative and spiritual environment.

⁸⁵ During the 1980s the works of Ivan Hadziiski were rediscovered as the main intellectual achievement in the study of the Bulgarian national character. He became known as the best Bulgarian '*narodopsicholog*' (people's psychologist).

⁸⁶ See Strashimir Dimitrov, *Sustoianie i zadachi na kraeznaniето*, (Sofia: Narodna Prosveta, 1978).

IX. Conclusion

The coexistence of Marxism and nationalism has been of primary importance for the modern world. According to Szporluk, 'Nationality and class are recognised now as essential components of individual identity and political legitimacy is a proof of how profoundly our modern outlook has been shaped by the ideologies of nationalism and Marxism.'⁸⁷ The main focus of the theoretical conceptualisations of the relationship, on one hand, between Marxist theory and communist ideology and nationalism on the other has been on the generalities rather than the specifics of each communist country's experience.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 240.

⁸⁸ Ibid. Szporluk's approach is different in that his account of the origins of the interaction between Marxism and nationalism focuses on Russia and from there draws conclusions about the general trends of the development of communism, nationalism and modernity. According to him classical Marxism was a theoretical achievement, which offered a model of society based on historical inevitability and as such it was a particular response to nationalism. Szporluk thinks that Marx's inability to recognise nationalism as a 'changing reality' meant also to ignore the pre-existing traditions in all of Eastern Europe. Hence, Szporluk argues, one of the most important factors in the relationship between Marxism and nationalism is that the former had a particular Russian interpretation, distinct from the rest of Europe and Eastern Europe. Russia, where Marxist theory was interpreted and practised, did not have the European development and was widely considered to be backward. Szporluk defines the most important features of Russian backwardness as the lack of differentiation between the state and society in an European fashion, the concept of intelligentsia as a 'peculiar category suggesting that its members must be separated from the state', and the introduction of the Industrial Revolution before the formation of the nation.⁸⁸ All these factors contributed to the traditional neglect of political and legal issues in Russia: 'Marx taught his Russian

But the dynamics between communism and nationalism in Eastern Europe differed from country to country. There is little disagreement that communism brought radical and overarching change in the entire region. In this classical sense, it constituted a revolution. But the nature of that revolution also varied from country to country. Massive action was undertaken to overthrow the existing political order. But the change was also forced upon on many levels of the society. Was there one or many communist revolutions and how national or international their aims were? At first nationalism seemed defeated by internationalism. But it was not long before it re-emerged as the strongest competitor for political power in Bulgaria and throughout Eastern Europe.

Eastern Europe before communism was politically backward. The roots of its backwardness were to be found in its history, geography and culture. MacNeil argues that the origins of the political backwardness of the entire area were in the 'political geography'. The Danubian and Pontiac Europe, where historically lands where the west met the east.⁸⁹ Armstrong calls Eastern Europe the 'shatter zone' encompassing the Danube basin of Europe and the Balkans further down to the east. These were the places where the big religions of Christianity and Islam clashed. Eastern Europe shaped around old ethnic boundaries, rather than modern political entities. As a result, ethnic identities became central to the region and civic values were hardly included.⁹⁰ At the bottom of the definition of Eastern Europe as politically backward region is the comparison with the

disciples that violent social revolution, not piece-meal political reform, offered the solution to Russia's problems'.

⁸⁹ William H. McNeill, Europe's Steppe Frontier 1500 - 1800, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964).

⁹⁰ John A. Armstrong, Nations before Nationalism, (Chapell Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 96-97 and p. 113.

West. Eastern Europe was always in contact with the West, but the communication was never sufficient. This in its own turn produced a constant desire in Eastern European society to imitate the West, but the results were always poor.⁹¹ Eastern European political development was uneven and interrupted; Eastern European westernisation was rather superficial. Nationalism has been the primary organising principle of Eastern European politics before the arrival of communism. Bibo argues that Eastern European political thinking was a 'phantasmagoric world' because it was based on distorted notions of nationalism. The involvement of the national consciousness in the building up of the political institutions in Eastern Europe before the WW II led to the 'grotesque phenomenon of a feudal, aristocratic, and authority-oriented anti-democratic nationalism.'⁹² Seton-Watson also described Eastern Europe as traditionally backward. Education in citizenship was not part of the history and the political tradition of Eastern Europe. Ethnic nationalism was institutionalised and became the main obstacle for the development of western type of democracy in the entire region. The missing ingredient in the Eastern European society was an integrative political framework for all the different nationalities living there. ⁹³

⁹¹ Daniel Chirot, 'Causes and Consequences of Backwardness' in The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics & Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century,

Daniel Chirot (ed.), (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1989), p. 200.

⁹² Istvan Bibo, 'The Jewish Question in Hungary (1948)' in Democracy, Revolution, Self-determination: Selected Writings, Nagy Karoly (ed.), Andras Boros-Kazai (tr.), (Series: East European Monographs, No. 317), (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 235- 236.

⁹³ Hugh Seton-Watson, Eastern Europe between the Wars: 1918-194, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946), p. 265.

The backwardness of the political traditions of Eastern Europe become even more apparent when looking at the Balkans. The politics of the Balkans have been determined by its history as a particular place in Eastern Europe. Here the political backwardness seemed mostly to be a result of the legacy of the Ottoman rule, often thought to have offered a more undemocratic political model if compared to the Habsburgs.⁹⁴ The movements for national independence and the consequent redrawing of the national boundaries after the withdrawal of the Ottomans, the disastrous effects of the Balkan wars and the First World War left the Balkan region disenchanted. Nationalism seemed to be the only force providing coherence in the otherwise deeply fragmented Balkan mind. The desire to build up the one-nation-state became the norm of the political thinking.

Communism was supposed to change the very idea of the nation-state radically. Eastern Europe and the Balkans were to be transformed by communist modernisation, which was to destroy the old order. Communism claimed that political backwardness was a capitalist attitude and this was to be eradicated. Eastern Europe was to be reinvented in the new communist paradigm of modernity, which was supra-national. Communist vision of the future was offered as a cure to all diseases of the past including nationalism. In Bulgaria communism promised new historical era. Indeed Bulgarian communism designed the most systematic and overarching plan for modernisation known in the history of the country. The entire political and economical culture of the country was to be changed in the most dramatic manner. From a national and 'nationalistic' bourgeoisie

⁹⁴ See Schöpflin, Politics in Eastern Europe, p. 11. See also John R. Lampe, 'Imperial Borderlands or Capitalist Periphery? Redefining Balkan Backwardness, 1520-1914' in The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics & Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century, Daniel Chirot (ed.), (Berkeley, Los Angeles,

state Bulgaria was to become a supra-national workers' democracy. The new Bulgaria was designed to be a Soviet style state. The 'people's republic' had to replace the west European model of democracy, which was the main source of inspiration for the pre-war Bulgaria. Although the inter-war politics of Bulgaria undoubtedly were ridden by authoritarianism, political party pluralism and democratic competition were the model to aspire to, regardless of the poor level of their application.⁹⁵ With the arrival of communism Bulgarian westernisation was banned. Communism stated that modernisation was to be carried out in isolation from the west. It severed the Bulgarian connections with western Europe and re-orientated the country towards the Soviet Euro-Asian communist world. Bulgaria felt this re-orientation as imposed, despite of the strong tradition of close relations with the Russian culture.

Communism understood progress as the institutionalisation of total and permanent control over the public and private spheres of life and no accountability of the rulers to the ruled. The politics of this formula, with all the intricacies and exceptions, became the new twist of the Eastern European backwardness.

London: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 177-209.

⁹⁵ See Oren, Revolution Administered, 1971.

Chapter 2: Communist Internationalism and Nationalism – The Bulgarian Content

I. Introduction

The main features of the BCP before the Second World War were: a) its origins as a Marxist party of no compromise, b) its adherence to 'pure' Marxism-Leninism as the political theory which was going to bring radical change in Bulgarian politics and society, and c) its loyalty to the Soviet communist leadership as the focus of its understanding of communist internationalism. From the outset Bulgarian communists rejected any debate on Marxism or Marxism-Leninism, which was their theoretical creed, and became intellectually isolated. By explaining society and history through the prism of working-class identity, they became representative for a very small part of Bulgarian society, which was predominantly peasant. The BCP's loyalty to the Soviet communists sustained its position as a powerful communist party in the Balkans.

The Bulgarian communist approach to issues of nationalism was new to Bulgarian political thinking. It claimed that nationalism as a political movement belonged to the bourgeoisie and was a tool for disguising class domination. Nationalism was not central to their theory. Theoretically it was analysed according to political events involving issues of Bulgarian national unity and in relation to communist internationalism.¹ On the other hand Bulgarian national questions were central to Bulgarian politics before 1944. Bulgarian communists had to respond to their external and internal aspects. According to

Bulgarian Marxist-Leninist theory, national questions in Bulgaria and in the Balkans were to be dictated in accord with communist internationalism and the Marxist-Leninist understanding of nationalism. As a solution to the most important Bulgarian national question before the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, the Macedonian question, the BCP professed the idea of the Balkan Communist Federation (BCF) under the control of Moscow. Most of their efforts went towards defending communist internationalism in terms of obedience to the Soviets rather than defining the terms of political rule of a future federation in the context of relations with the other Balkan communist parties. The BCP's theoretical proposition on the Macedonian question in Bulgaria proved futile as the idea of a Balkan federation was not realised. Macedonia's autonomy or independence, envisioned as a stage of its development, did not develop the way the BCP envisioned. The main reason for this in the context of internationalism was the complexities of the Tito-Stalin split which determined the BCP's policy towards the Macedonian question. From 1949 onwards the BCP developed a new line of thinking - that the Macedonian question in Bulgaria was an internal one. As such it turned into a question of the existence of Macedonian national minority in the country.

¹ See Todor Pavlov, Izbranie Filosofskie Proizvedenia, (Moscow: Innostrannoi Literaturi, 1962), vol. 2, p. 105.

II. Nationalism and Internationalism: Marx and Engels

In Marx and Engels' theory class affinity was more important than national differences. Questions of nation and nationalism were not ignored but rather discussed on different occasions and in different places in their theory. The Communist Manifesto stated: 'The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself *the* nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.'² Marx thus observed that the concept of class existed within the framework of the nation yet at the same time lacked national characteristics in the way the bourgeois concept of nation did. According to Marx this national specificity, which was an attribute of the bourgeoisie, was going to be obliterated by the advancement of industrialisation. In 'The German Ideology' Marx argued: 'Generally speaking, big industries created everywhere the same relations between the classes of society, and thus destroyed the peculiar individuality of the various nationalities. And finally, while the bourgeoisie of each nation still retained separate national interests, big industry created a class, which in all nations has the same interest and with which nationality is already dead; a class which is really rid of all the old world and at the same time stands pitted against it.'³ Marx also viewed that national differences, which were a source of hostility, were bound to disappear in a homogenised industrialised world: 'National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the

² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto, (London Penguin Books, 1985), p. 102.

³ Karl Marx, 'The German Ideology: Part I' in Robert C. Tucker (ed.) The Marx-Engels Reader, (New York London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978) pp. 185-186.

world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto.”⁴

Marx differentiated between nationality and nation. He did not seem to suggest that the elimination of nationalities would create a world not divided into nations. Marx’s idea was that nations may still exist but they would not be in antagonistic relations to each other. Marx envisioned that after the proletariat achieved political power, international relations would not be defined by hostile nationalistic perceptions: ‘In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nations vanishes, the hostility of the nation to another will come to an end.’⁵ Marx assumed that national interests did not drive proletarians by nature, as they were the ‘working men who have no country’. Working men have nothing to loose as they are deprived of basic rights, namely, they do not have control over the means of production. The deprivation they all suffer from makes them equal. However Marx did not mean that proletarians had no homeland since the proletarians should rise to the national class, which then would carry out the proletarian revolution. Marx also defined the basic difference between communists from other working-class parties as follows: ‘In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality.’⁶ In this way Marx defined the communist leadership in a supra-national dimension.

Marx argued that a high degree of development of productive forces presupposes the ‘*world historical* instead of local’ existence of men. The universal development of

⁴ Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto, p. 102.

⁵ Ibid., p.102.

⁶ Ibid., p. 95.

productive forces conditions ‘a *universal* intercourse between men’, ‘which produces in all nations simultaneously the phenomenon of the ‘propertyless mass.’ This, concluded Marx, ‘makes each nation dependent on the revolutions of the others’.⁷ Marx asserted that communism could not be a ‘local event’.⁸ In Marxist terms communist movement rested on universal interaction between world-historical units (individuals or nations).

It would be very difficult to project how Marx and Engels would have viewed international relations between ‘really existing’ socialist states. Yet as Light points out: ‘If Marx and Engels had thought about socialist foreign policy, they would not have expected it to be the functions of traditional state institutions.’⁹ Indeed Marx and Engels had a particular view on the nature of the state as well as on its development. In classical Marxism the state was seen as a ‘particular stage of development’ of society.¹⁰ The state, Marx and Engels viewed, arose as an organ of society, standing above it and ‘from the need to keep class antagonisms in check’. The state was a tool in the hands of the most economically powerful class, which were also the ruling class and ‘an organisation for the protection of the possessing class against the nonpossessing class.’¹¹ The highest form of the state in which the last battle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat would take place is the democratic republic. In a classless society the state would have no place: ‘The society which organises production anew on the basis of free and equal association of the

⁷ Marx, ‘The German Ideology’, p. 162.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Margot Light, The Soviet Theory of International Relations, (Great Britain: Wheatsheaf Books, 1988), p. 147.

¹⁰ Friedrich Engels, ‘The Basis of the State: From The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State’ in Neil J. Smelser, (ed.) , Karl Marx on Society and Social Change, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press), 1973, p. 18.

¹¹ Ibid., pp.19-20.

producers will put the whole state machinery where it will then belong - into the museum of antiquities, next to the spinning wheel and the bronze axe.'¹²

In 'On the Jewish Question' Marx defined the political character of the state in relation to political emancipation and in opposition to civil society. Marx believed that the political state was a completely developed political form. Man, according to him, lived in the political state as a social being and more precisely as a '*communal being*' as opposed to life in civil society where he acts as '*private individual*'.¹³ Marx argued that being a member of the political state brings man closer to the universe and divests him from individual life.¹⁴ Marx viewed that socialisation of man was a higher form of existence, freed from '*illusory*' individualism. Yet at the same time he did not deny the existence of the individual as such. He rather saw the individual in relation to the '*world-historically existence*'.¹⁵

But what role would the nation play exactly in Marx's political state where there should be no nationality differences and in an international world devoid from national antagonism? Could the individual be part of a '*world-historically existence*' and a member of a nation at the same time and what exactly it would mean for his/her identity in terms of being both '*communal being*' and '*private individual*'? Marx and Engels did not give direct answers to such questions. When discussing what transformation the state would undergo on the way to becoming a communist society, Marx answered the question what social functions will remain in existence there that are analogous to the present functions

¹² Ibid., p. 21.

¹³ Karl Marx, 'On the Jewish Question' in Tucker, The Marx-Engels Reader, p. 34.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Marx, 'The German Ideology', p. 162.

of the state: 'This question can only be answered scientifically and one does not get a flea-hop nearer to the problem by a thousand-fold combination of the word people with the word state.'¹⁶

Further on, Marx stated that the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat was the political transitional period of the development of the state. But he did not explain what was going to happen to the nation in this political transition, though we may assume that the status of the proletariat achieved as a 'national class', would also be a transitional stage on the way towards universal humanity. It was left for future generations to decide what was the future of the nation and its particular relationship to the citizen and the state in the world where the communist system became reality.

¹⁶ Karl Marx, 'The Transition to Communist Society: From A Critique of the Gotha Programme', in Smelser, Karl Marx of Society and Social Change, p. 201.

III. Marxism-Leninism: Lenin's Contribution to the Theory of Internationalism and Nationalism

While the relationship between internationalism and the idea of the nation was developed as a political model in classical Marxism, Leninism sought to develop a theory of internationalism and nationalism which had immediate practical application. Lenin's views differed in some ways from those of Marx and Engels' but nevertheless were based on his understanding of Marx. The fact that Lenin had to deal with a region which was different from Western Europe in geographical and economical terms was also an important factor in the way his thinking on nationalism and internationalism developed. The specific conditions of the Russian situation on many levels determined Lenin's views. Lenin's reworking of Marxist theory was mainly in the emphasis he put on the revolutionary aspect of classical Marxism.

In relation to the questions of internationalism and nationalism Lenin expanded the political dimension of the issue. He underlined the need for democratic centralism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in order to establish communist rule in any country and also in order to co-ordinate the united struggle of the proletarian revolution. Lenin firmly believed that the proletarian revolution in Russia should be conducted by a well-organised professional communist revolutionary party, as opposed to Marx's general vision of communists not having 'sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.'¹⁷

Central to Lenin's ideas on national questions was his theory of the right to self-determination. His definition of self-determination of nations was that it was a method

of political separation of oppressed nations from alien national bodies, and for the formation of independent national states: 'The right of nations to self-determination implies exclusively the right to independence in the political sense, the right to free political separation from the oppressor nation.'¹⁸ Lenin underlined that the right for self-determination did not mean simply separation but 'only a consistent expression of struggle against all national oppression.'¹⁹ Thus Lenin was not in favour of secession for its own sake . He was for self-determination as a political arrangement between different state units. Further on Lenin saw self-determination as justified when it was progressive, namely when it was leading the working class towards freedom from 'alien' national oppression and when the final goal was international solidarity. Thus similarly to Marx and Engels Lenin saw nationalism in the context of a broader strategy, which aimed to establish proletarian world unity.

On the other hand Lenin regarded nationalism as a reaction to oppression, particularly when the question was about minorities' nationalism. Lenin believed that national movements in Russia should be tamed by offering them the right to self-determination: 'He [Lenin] was convinced that the only way to combat nationalism was by the use of the carrot, not the stick'.²⁰ He also thought that the proletarian revolution in Eastern Europe (Austria, the Balkans and Russia) could not be carried without 'championing the right of

¹⁷ Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto p. 95.

¹⁸ 'The Significance of the Right to Self - Determination and its Relation to Federation' in John Riddell (ed.), The Communist International in Lenin's Time: Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International: Documents:1907-1916. The Preparatory Years, (New York: Monad Press, 1984), p. 356.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 356.

²⁰ See Walker Connor, The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 34.

nations to self-determination'. Here, Lenin wrote, the most difficult was to unite the class struggle of the oppressor nation with that of the workers from the oppressed nation.' ²¹

Lenin's idea about self-determination was that, as an act of secession it should be understood only as a transitional period. Once again his concept of self-determination was emphasised as a political one in the sense that secession was permitted only when serving the political objectives of a broad communist movement. Essentially self-determination was an idea which favoured internationalism though used nationalism on the way towards achieving it. Self-determination in Lenin's terms was not determined by cultural or ethnic desires, though he did not deny their existence, but by the political aspirations of the respective communities. Thus similarly to Marx and Engels, Lenin saw nationalism in its political dimension and as a stage of the political development of the state.

On the question of the relationship between self-determination and federation Lenin firmly believed that the latter should not be considered as a logical ultimate aim of the former. Lenin favoured the establishment of a strong centralist state. Federations, according to him, weakened the economic ties of the state and raised the question about how agreements were to be achieved between the participants.²² On the other hand Lenin specifically emphasised that self-determination was not synonymous with recognition of federation, and also that federation was not in contradiction with democratic centralism and could be offered as a solution depending on political

²¹ 'Three Types of Countries with Respect to the Self-Determination of Nations', in Riddell, The Communist International in Lenin's Time, pp. 358-359.

²² See Ephraim Nimni, Marxism and Nationalism: Theoretical Origins of a Political Crisis, (London Concord, Mass: Pluto Press), 1991, pp. 76-77.

circumstances. Federation, asserted Lenin, was even what Marx, as a centralist, preferred as a solution to the Irish question. Federation, asserted Lenin, means integration of nations against foreign oppression as well as oppression from their own nation. Thus federation was both a political concept as much as a practical political solution for national questions.

On the question of autonomy, Lenin again accepted it only as a possible stage on the way towards the inevitable 'merging' (*slyianie*) of the nations. In response to demands for cultural-national autonomy, Lenin proposed the project for equal rights - 'the division of the country into autonomous and self-governing territorial units according - among other things - to nationality.'²³ Lenin included into his project for equal rights the rights of national minorities to participate in the educational and cultural institutions and to practice their own languages. Lenin recommended these 'equal rights' as a remedy to those who may demand autonomy. Similarly to the idea of self-determination, which Lenin developed as an interim stage on the way to the establishment of the full power of the world proletariat, he also saw nationalities' equality as a temporary stage on the way towards internationalism.

The usage of nationalism in Lenin's thinking for the purposes of the advancement of the proletarian revolution, under the strict command of the highly organised communist party and within the framework of a highly centralised state, even if it was a federation, taught communist leaders that nationalism may be actively used in the name of higher, internationalist aims. This was a Leninist innovation, which was reflected in the thinking of many of communist ideologists.

²³See Connor, The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy, pp. 36-37.

IV. Stalin: 'What is a nation?'

The most celebrated part of Stalin's theory about the nation is his definition of what is a nation: 'A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.'²⁴ This definition was a considerable move away from Marxist and Leninist thinking about the nation. Firstly Stalin asserted that the nation was not simply a function of class, but is a phenomenon on its own. Secondly despite the vagueness of the concept of the nation possessing a 'psychological make-up', Stalin accepted that the nation was a multidimensional phenomenon and most importantly that it had a non-rational element.

But on the other hand Stalin asserted that no national characteristic could be conceptualised outside its social discourse (*usloviami zhizni*).²⁵ In his critique of Otto Bauer's views on the Jewish nation, Stalin underlines that there could be no nation based on religion alone, as this was the only common characteristic which Jews possessed, according to him because there could be no nation without economic and cultural unity.²⁶ Stalin's views on the nature of nations and nationalism were defined in this interconnection between the social, historical and economic aspect of the nation on one hand and its religious, ethnic and linguistic dimension on the other. Stalin spent considerable time trying to come to terms with the contradictions between the two.

²⁴ Joseph Stalin, 'The Nation' in John Hutchinson & Anthony Smith (eds.), Nationalism, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 20.

²⁵ I. Stalin, 'Nazia' in Marxizm i Nazionalno-Kolonialnii Vopros, Sbornik izbranih statei i rechei, (Partizdat CK VKP, 1937), pp. 6-7.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

Although he gave priority to the former, he was very aware how difficult it was to deal with the latter.

Stalin emphasised that the nation was a community, not 'racial or tribal, but a historically constituted community.'²⁷ Therefore, he argued, the nation is 'subject to the law of change, has its history, its beginning and end.' The nation, postulated Stalin, can not be conceptualised in any spiritual or idealistic framework, but only as determined by socio-economic conditions.²⁸ Stalin distinguished between 'national community' and 'state community'. According to him national community must possess a common original language whereas the state only needs an official one. Yet Stalin did not specify whether that meant that the nation would 'wither away' in the course of the proletarian revolution which would change the status of the state itself.

Stalin viewed that national questions could be solved only according to the political expediency of historical circumstances. He believed that national issues are of a changing nature and that Marx and his followers themselves showed this in their views of the Polish national question.²⁹ Stalin stressed that national autonomy did not solve national questions. On the contrary by 'sharpening and confusing it', national autonomy works against the unity of the proletariat and creates conditions for further divisions.³⁰ Stalin asserted that national autonomy should not be confused with the right to self-determination. According to his theory national autonomy presupposes the unity of *nationality* whereas self-determination applies to *nations*. National autonomy works against

²⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 19 and pp. 15-16.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

the development of the nation, since it aims to organise nations in an artificial way. The question of dispersed nations becomes in reality a *nationality* problem. Stalin's concept of nationality was in many ways a concept about national minorities, though he did not say it. But when he referred to the rights of nationalities he actually referred to the idea developed by the Austrian Marxists, Otto Bauer and Karl Renner, who proposed constitutional arrangements for national minorities. Stalin did not believe in such rights because they implied national autonomy, which could not be a transitional form because these nationalities have lost their economic and territorial ties on the first place.³¹ Stalin makes it very clear that preserving the 'national character of national minorities' in the language of Austrian Marxists is a ridiculous demand because they were generally 'primitive'.³² Stalin also saw national autonomy as being in contradiction to Marx's views on national questions. Stalin emphasised that if the state was going to 'wither away', national autonomy is not helpful in the process because it works against the 'giant growth of capitalist production and the re-grouping of nationalities in order to unite them in bigger territories.'³³ This was the theoretical basis for Stalin's notorious policy of resettling nationalities in the Soviet Union.

Stalin's views on internationalism were defined in opposition to nationalism and Greater Russian chauvinism in particular. Stalin asserted that the major role of the October revolution was to liberate people 'under the banner of mutual trust and brotherly rapprochement between workers' and peasants' nationalities in the USSR'. This was in opposition to any movement that unites 'under the banner of national animosities or

³¹ Ibid., p.24.

³² Ibid., pp. 24-25. Stalin uses the example of Tatars and Georgians.

³³ Ibid., p. 25.

international clashes' in the name of nationalism.³⁴ In his speech addressing the Yugoslav committee at the Comintern in 1925, Stalin criticised the Yugoslav communist leadership for not having understood the true internationalist principles according to which the national questions of Yugoslavia should be solved. Stalin stated that after the October revolution the main factor in international politics became the new international relations and the fight against imperialism. Yugoslav communists, he stated, not only do not take into account this factor but also are 'connected to certain imperialist groupings'. It was the new international situation, which demanded from Yugoslavia to apply the right for self-determination and autonomy, if necessary, 'after the model of the Soviet system'.³⁵

Since the federal Soviet state was established with national units having the status of equal republics, Stalin asserted that after the victory of the revolution, the different nations should support Russia against imperialism.³⁶ Stalin saw the major threat to international communism in the international co-operation of imperialist powers. As Stalinist practices revealed during the years of his rule of the Soviet Union, Stalin would also see disagreements among the communist parties as directly linked to the international imperialist enemy.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 189-190.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 152-154.

³⁶ See Robert King, Minorities under Communism: Nationalities as a Source of Tension among Balkan Communist States, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 22.

V. The Foundations of Bulgarian Marxism-Leninism: Blagoev and Dimitrov

The founder of the Bulgarian socialist movement, Dimitur Blagoev, considered himself to be a firm and pure Marxist. While studying in Russia he discovered Russian translations of Marx and Engels. In his early interpretations of Marxism Blagoev was inspired mainly by Plehanov and Kautsky. Later on he argued against their views, which he declared revisionist. He also rejected Eduard Bernstein, the German social democrat, as well as the Austro-Marxists for having misinterpreted Marxism by denying the supremacy of the class theory and sold out to bourgeois socialism.³⁷ Blagoev was also against anybody who did not fully adhere to his views within Bulgarian socialist thought. His main opponent was Yanko Sakuzov, who became leader of the moderates in the early Bulgarian socialist movement and in general professed broader coalition of the left forces. In difference to Blagoev, who became a revolutionary thinker of the Russian pattern, Sakuzov pursued his studies in the West, in Germany, France and England. Blagoev rejected him as being a bourgeois thinker who was trying to expropriate Marxism.³⁸

Blagoev's theoretical views on questions of nations and nationalism were developed in relation to two main debates: the theory of class relations and struggle and the idea about the Balkan federation, which involved the Macedonian question. He himself defined Marxist thinking as based on economics : "The main theoretical foundation, which serves as a principle foundation for social democracy, is scientific socialism, namely Marx's

³⁷ See Dimitur Blagoev, 'Marxizmut i Bernshtainstvoto?', in Dimitur Blagoev protiv revizionizma: Antologia, (Sofia: Partizdat, 1973) pp. 90-116.

³⁸ See Dimitur Blagoev, 'Pro domo sua', pp. 30-44 and 'Marxovoto uchenie i Dr. Sakuzov (pak pro domo sua)', pp. 45-61, in Protiv revizionizma, (Sofia: Partizdat, 1973).

philosophical-economical doctrine. The essence of it is in the economical organisation of society, which is the basis for its legal and political organisation and in its history as a history of class struggle. It follows that any political regime in any country is conditioned by the respective dominant economic organisation and that its elimination could be carried out by change in the economic basis.’³⁹

Central to Blagoev’s views about the nation was the idea that the nation was created as a result of class relations. His starting point was Marx’s notion that the nation is the framework within which the working class expands in order to become a national force. Blagoev argued that the nation’s significance is in its political meaning as far as it was united as a class - the nation as a political unit could have consciousness only as a class unit, under the banner of Marxism.⁴⁰ Thus Blagoev asserted that there was no nation outside class. Also in his view the idea of the nation was closely related to the concept of class unity. He asserted that the unity of the nation was firstly determined by its class-consciousness. That is why, he argued, the nation has to be united territorially in order to become a united class. The proletariat needs to be a territorially united class, wrote Blagoev: ‘If one big part of the national unit is separated from many other national units living outside, the question about national unification becomes very important.’⁴¹ For Blagoev claimed that the national unity of the proletariat was a condition for the success of the class struggle. In his view the national unity would make it possible for the working class to carry out the revolution. This was so, argued Blagoev, because ‘national unity creates better conditions for social development as well as for the better

³⁹ Blagoev, ‘Pro domo sua’, p. 30.

⁴⁰ Dimitur Blagoev, ‘Nazionalnoto obedinenie i rabotnicheskata klasa’ in Suchinenia, (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata Komunisticheska Partia) (year of publication not indicated), vol.13, p. 284.

development of more powerful production forces.’ Thus Blagoev saw the nation as the proletarian territory where the class revolution takes place. Yet on the other side Blagoev claimed that the proletariat could not be restricted to any particular territory because it was a world force: ‘there is one united proletariat, which includes all different parts of the proletariat from various developed capitalist countries’.⁴² Blagoev believed that separate national proletarian units were restricted to national territory now but they would achieve the unification of the proletarian world in the future.

Blagoev did believe that economics determined all interests in society and that this was according to the ‘material’ concept of Marxism. He argued that contrary to ‘material’ Marxism, the bourgeois concepts about nation centred on ‘national ideals’ diverted the attention of the proletariat towards the ‘immaterial’ dimension of the nation and this aimed to prevent the proletariat from becoming a strong class. At the same time ‘the so-called ‘national ideals’, according to him, were ‘actually egotistical class interests...which work against the freedom and the rights of the proletariat.’⁴³ Blagoev saw the solution to any national questions in Bulgaria in understanding and transforming the nation into class organisation. In this way, he argued, the proletariat would expand and would be able to dictate solutions to any national questions in Bulgaria and in the Balkans.⁴⁴ He asserted that the Bulgarian proletariat would lead the future development of the Bulgarian nation.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 285.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 287.

Blagoev's views on class and nation were further developed in his article 'The Proletariat and the Homeland' in response to the critique by Plehanov and Kautsky to Marx's idea that 'the proletariat has no homeland'. There Blagoev argued that the above authors were essentially revisionists who by analysing Marx's theory of communism and nationalism were trying to present both Marx and Engels as nationalists in order to justify their own nationalistic bourgeois views. Blagoev argued that the real meaning of Marx's statement about 'workers having no homeland' was that 'the mere idea of homeland is essentially an idea which maintains permanent hostility between people, between nations. It is being implanted by the dominant classes in the mind of the exploited and oppressed people.'⁴⁵ According to him this was the Marxist view and to accept any deviation from it would mean to 'take the slippery road towards *sozialpatriotizma* (social-patriotism), which means becoming a counterrevolutionary.'⁴⁶ Blagoev condemned all social-patriots like Kautsky for making a big error by claiming that Marx and Engels were interested in any kind of nationalism even if it was connected to the idea of encompassing all nations under the umbrella of the world proletariat.⁴⁷ He insisted that Marx and Engels had a very clear and unambiguous position on the question of nationalism: 'Marx and Engels say simply that "workers have no homeland"' Blagoev repeated, 'workers with class consciousness give priority to the endlessly broader idea about the solidarity between the proletariat of all countries, namely to the entire revolutionary mankind.'⁴⁸

Blagoev's effort to reject anybody who revised 'pure' Marxism led him to contradictions in his own concept - on one hand the proletariat had national territory but on the other it

⁴⁵ Dimitur Blagoev, 'Proletariatut i otechestvoto' in Protiv revizionizma, p. 482.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.488-489.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.485.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.486.

had no country. Blagoev also claimed that there was national consciousness which was to be transformed into a class-consciousness so that the nation would become a proletarian unit, but at the same time asserted that national consciousness was formed as a result of already activated class interests based on presupposed class consciousness. It may be assumed that the national territory where the nation lived prior its transformation as a world unit would continue to be inhabited by the national class, but it would not be 'homeland' anymore, though Blagoev did not say what would it be.

Blagoev's theoretical views on the state in relation to the nation was expressed in the idea of a Balkan federation. Blagoev argued that the idea of a Balkan federation is an expression of the Bulgarian social-democrats' 'Marxist substantiated position' on the so-called Balkan problem (*problema*). According to him there were in general two solutions: 'creating a Balkan federation or creating one Balkan state by military force, which would require destroying Turkey. Yet the safest choice remains the Balkan federation.'⁴⁹ Blagoev argued that national unity was the central issue for Bulgaria and it could be achieved only by creating a Balkan federation. His main argument was that history showed how the bourgeoisie was incapable of finding a solution for the Bulgarian national unity because it was led by its own class interests and highly nationalistic spirit. Only the working class could develop the right idea about creating a Balkan federation.⁵⁰ Social democracy, wrote Blagoev, offered the only correct solution to Balkan animosities. This was the united class struggle led by the Balkan proletariat.⁵¹ This was so because Balkan people had very different faith, language, literature, and social development. The Balkan bourgeoisie based its nationalism on the basis of these differences and used them to

⁴⁹ Dimitur Blagoev, 'Balkanskiat vupros', in Suchinenia, pp. 384- 395.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 286.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.393.

justify its reactionary views but its sole purpose was to oppress people as working classes as belonging to different nationalities. Therefore, Blagoev argued, the first prerequisite for creating a Balkan federation was to eliminate the Balkan dynasties.⁵² The bourgeoisie could not and should not participate in the class-based struggle for a Balkan federation because its consciousness could not be changed. The Balkan *problema* could be solved only in the 'spirit of an internationally conscious proletariat'.⁵³

The primary purpose of the Balkan federation thus was to free the Balkan working people from class oppression and to unite them in the world-wide proletariat. This would eliminate the nationally different Balkan bourgeoisie and establish the rule of a united Balkan proletariat, which had no nationality. Blagoev's view was Marxist as far as he saw national differences as an attribute of the bourgeoisie in the respective countries, whereas the Balkan *proletariats* were not marked by them. He viewed that the working class was not nationalistic by nature. Although he did not explain in his theoretical works in what shape different Balkan countries would appear in a federal structure, it seems that Blagoev envisioned a strong federal state ruled by a united proletarian unit still consisting of the different Balkan *proletariats*, not differing in terms of nationality.

Blagoev's theoretical views on the Macedonian movement were also based on the concept of class struggle. Blagoev declared that he was in favour of the Macedonian movement as long as it was directed first of all against class enemies of the Bulgarian people.⁵⁴ The disagreements within the Macedonian movement, he argued, were due to

⁵² Ibid., p.386.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 395.

⁵⁴ Dimitur Blagoev, 'Makedonskoto dvizhenie', in Prinos kum istoriata na sotsializma v Bulgaria, (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata Komunisticheska Partia, 1949), pp. 99-107.

the sharpening of class antagonism: 'the unity of the "Macedonian movement" collapsed due to the advancement of the class differentiation. The different organisations, which emerged after its collapsed, degenerated simply into tools of factious bourgeois politics defending the collective interests of the bourgeois class.'⁵⁵ Blagoev saw the unity of the Balkans as a prerequisite of the Bulgarian national unity and the Macedonian movement as part of it. Yet it remained unclear what he thought would happen once a Balkan federation was established: would there be a Macedonian unit in the Bulgarian state or would the merger with Bulgaria in the framework of a Balkan federation mean that there would be no Bulgaria either?

Blagoev's most famous follower was the legendary Bulgarian communist leader Georgi Dimitrov. Like him he studied Marx and Engels' writings primarily in the context of political developments in Russia. But Dimitrov also made a career in the international communist movement and became the first communist leader of Bulgaria. During his lifetime Dimitrov had actually to apply the theory of communism in practice in the context of an established communist system. Like Blagoev Dimitrov also considered himself a 'pure' Marxist-Leninist. His main contribution in the field of the communist theory of internationalism was the theory of the united fatherland front or the Popular Front. It was a breakthrough in the Soviet line on the struggle against fascism. Dimitrov was then head of the Western European Bureau, chief defendant in the Reichstag Fire Trial in 1933 and Secretary General-elect of the Comintern. In 1934 he stressed the need for a review of Comintern tactics according to the specific circumstances. Previously the Comintern was against any alliances or collaboration with non-communist political forces in the struggle against fascism. In 1935 Dimitrov urged the communist movement to declare joint action with the Social-Democratic parties, reformist trade unions and other

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 100.

organisations in the name of the proletarian revolution. Dimitrov in effect recommended the search for the broadest possible anti-fascist coalition, which was a considerable move away from the general anti-war stand of the Comintern. As Stern argues the central notion in the idea of the Popular Front was power-orientation in defence of the anti-fascist powers in order to deter aggression: 'an ideological shift had been grounded in considerations of power.'⁵⁶

Dimitrov criticised the 'narrow sectarian attitude in formulating and solving the immediate political tasks of the Party' as opposed to the mass fight against fascism.⁵⁷ He called for joint action in order to overcome the national and international split of the proletariat as well as for the national and international unity of the trade unions. He also introduced the idea of a united front government as an 'instrument of the collaboration of the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat' which he was particularly proud to declare a form of the Leninist approach to 'transitional forms' on the way to the proletarian revolution. Dimitrov explained the united front in the context of the nation-state. Nationalism, he declared, was a bourgeois ideology, whereas national pride was part of the working class link to Bulgaria's past. Here he supported his opinion with Lenin's approach to the national question. Dimitrov underlined that Bulgarian communists should be proud of their homeland in the same fashion as Lenin was proud of his own 'Great-Russian nation' because it created a revolutionary class. Referring to his defence at

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Stern, The Rise and Decline of International Communism, (England: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 1990), p. 78.

⁵⁷ Georgi Dimitrov, 'The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International' and 'The Struggle of the Working Class against Fascism: Report before the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, delivered on August 2, 1935', in Georgi Dimitrov, For a United and Popular Front, (Sofia: Sofia Press), (year of publication not indicated), p.128.

the Reichstag Fire Trial, Dimitrov declared: 'I was proud of being a son of the heroic Bulgarian working class'.⁵⁸ Thus Dimitrov was clear that he had Bulgarian national identity as far as it was the identity of the working-class man.

Dimitrov was quite clear about his views on proletarian internationalism - it ensures the unity of the working class in the struggle of each individual country for 'national, social and cultural freedom'. The leader of communist internationalism was the 'great Soviet Union' where the highest form of an international and national culture, stated Dimitrov, was realised - that is, 'national in form and socialist in content'. In difference to Blagoev, Dimitrov said more about the nature of the future Bulgarian communist state. He defined it as a state based on the class identity of the Bulgarian people, which was to be constructed in opposition to the capitalist idea of a state based on private property. Dimitrov viewed that the meaning of state independence was freedom from the oppression of capitalism. He also viewed that Bulgaria was a small state (capitalist or otherwise), that needed the protection of a bigger power, the Soviet Union or the Balkan federation, which would facilitate the union of the Bulgarian proletariat on the way to becoming part of a communist world union. Dimitrov understood the state as a transitional form in Leninist terms. However in his theory he did not envision the merger of Bulgaria with the Soviet Union directly: 'Bulgaria will not go to be a Soviet republic. It will be a people's republic. The leading role will be in the hands of the overwhelming majority of the people - workers, peasants, craftsmen and people's intelligentsia. Bulgaria will be a free and independent state with its own national and state sovereignty. She will not play to the tune of any capitalists, which aim to enslave politically and economically small people.'⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 180.

⁵⁹ Georgi Dimitrov, Izbrani proizvedenia, (Sofia: Partizdat, 1972), p. 174.

Dimitrov understood national independence as a struggle against the 'enemy's camp'. As far as relationship with USSR and other communist countries was concerned he understood Bulgarian political independence as inseparable from communist internationalism: 'People's democracy and people's democratic state stand for internationalism. Nationalism is incompatible with people's democracy, because it is a weapon of capitalism and capitalist reactionaries. Nationalism in all its forms is an enemy of communism. . . . While fighting nationalism in all its realisations, we must bring up the labour masses in the spirit of proletarian internationalism and dedication to our homeland, which means in the spirit of true patriotism.'⁶⁰ Further on he emphasised that both internationalism and patriotism⁶¹ mean above all unity of people's democracies with the Soviet Union against imperialism.

Similarly to Blagoev, Dimitrov also rejected all revisionist views on Marxism and Leninism, though he criticised some aspects of the Bulgarian communist movement during its 'narrow' period (*tesniachestvoto*) under the leadership of Blagoev. Dimitrov asserted that the BCP's ('Narrows') greatest contribution was its participation in the BCF. Thus, he concluded, the BCP worked 'for the reinforcement of solidarity between the Bulgarian labour masses and the labour masses from the other Balkan countries as well as with those from the entire world. Dimitrov was a passionate supporter of the idea of the Balkan communist federation. His theory was to be tested by communist policy, which he himself would direct.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.258.

⁶¹ Dimitrov occasionally used the concept of patriotism as opposed to nationalism but did not give it a definition.

VI. The Bulgarian Communist Movement and the Balkan Federation

The Balkan socialists developed the idea of a Balkan federation during the second half of the 19th century. A federation, it seemed, would not only facilitate the further development of capitalism but equally importantly would put an end to the Balkan rivalries and establish a powerful state between Austria and Russia. Apart from the economic and diplomatic problems, a Balkan federation was supposed to solve the main bone of contention among the Balkan states - the Macedonian question. The League for Balkan Confederation envisioned the future federation as a confederation consisting of self-administered states. The federation pact was to be supervised by delegates in Constantinople.⁶² Macedonia was to be granted autonomy as a part of the general confederation.

In 1910 the first general Balkan Socialist Conference met in Belgrade where the Bulgarian socialists were represented by their 'Narrow' wing, Blagoev and Dimitrov included.⁶³

Two main objectives of the Balkan federation were formulated there: to free the Balkans from foreign domination and to emancipate them. Most importantly the federation was supposed to remove the artificial state barriers, which separated the Balkan people - closely connected by language, culture and economics.⁶⁴ Thus the original idea of the BCF was that it would remove small state boundaries in order to facilitate closer relations between linguistically and culturally related people in the Balkans. Within the framework

⁶² See L. S. Stavrianos, Balkan Federation: A History of the Movement Toward Balkan Unity in Modern Times, (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1964), p.151.

⁶³ See Joseph Rothschild, The Communist Party of Bulgaria: Origins and Development, 1883-1936, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 210.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 210.

of Marxist thinking a Balkan federation would unite Balkan people in a larger state unit by removing bourgeois national boundaries under the leadership of the proletariat.

In Bulgaria the socialist movement had to take a stand on the Macedonian question during the Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913. Yanko Sakuzov, representing the 'Broad' wing of the Bulgarian socialists declared that although the Bulgarian involvement in the wars was wrong, Macedonia was Bulgarian. The 'Narrows' led by Blagoev also remained firmly for finding a peaceful solution but supported the idea of the Balkan federation as a solution to the Macedonian question.⁶⁵ In October 1912 the Central Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) issued a manifesto, drafted by Lenin, on the Balkan wars. It was circulated and also published in German, French, and Belgian Socialist newspapers. In the manifesto the Balkan problems were explained as 'chain of events since the turn of the century leading to sharper class and international contradictions, to wars and revolutions.'⁶⁶ The manifesto declared support for Balkan socialists who were against the war and clearly set out that they should act in accord with Leninist principles: 'A federal Balkan republic is the rallying cry that our brother socialists in the Balkan countries have issued to the masses in their struggle for self-determination and complete freedom of the peoples, to clear the way for a broad class struggle for socialism'.⁶⁷ Further on the manifesto declared that victory for a Balkan federation could be achieved together with victory for a republic in Russia, both being long-term objectives of the 'international revolutionary Social-Democracy'.⁶⁸ Lenin supported the idea of the BCF mainly on the grounds of the primary importance of political

⁶⁵ See Rothschild, The Communist Party of Bulgaria, pp. 216-222.

⁶⁶ See Riddell, 'To All Citizens of Russia', pp. 84-87.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.85.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 87.

expediency. Also by suggesting that it should go hand in hand with the establishment of communist Russia, he must have had in mind that the movement towards the BCF should be co-ordinated with the Bolsheviks' struggle.

Lenin's idea was in accord with the declaration of the inaugural session of the BCF in 1920 in Sofia, when it was declared that the Balkan countries were in a position of being semi-colonised by the Great Powers and that their free development could be achieved only by a proletarian revolution, which would unite the Balkan proletariat in a federation. At that stage communists envisioned a federation consisting of Soviet-style states. This was postulated in the resolution previously issued by the Bulgarian 'Narrows' at the congress held in Sofia in 1919. The goal was to establish a Balkan Federation of Soviet Socialist Republics.⁶⁹ The resolution emphasised that the different federal units should be coordinated with the international communist movement. More precisely each party was to be affiliated with the Comintern. But on the level of being a federal unit they should create a union of Balkan communist republics.

Essentially it was suggested that the BCF should be organised as a centralised federal state controlled by the Soviets. The resolution of the BCF's conference held in Sofia in 1920 stated that 'the Balkan Communist Federation's founding principle was to unite the Balkan nations into 'one Balkan Socialist Soviet Republic'.⁷⁰ This aim was to be achieved by: a) 'liberation of the Balkan nations from the political, financial and economic rule of the imperialist Entente, their national freedom and union, the creation of conditions necessary for the development of their productive forces', b) educating the Balkan

⁶⁹ See Rothschild, The Communist party of Bulgaria, p. 223-224.

⁷⁰ 'Appendix I: Resolutions of the Balkan Communist Conference, Sofia, January 1920. in Stavrianos, Balkan Federation, p. 304.

proletariat and propertyless masses in a 'revolutionary Socialist (Marxist) spirit in order to make them conscious of their historic problems', c) coordinating the actions of the Balkan communist and socialist parties in order to support the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic. The resolution stated also that the unsolved national problems in the Balkans were due to the 'reactionary and arbitrary forms of government employed by the bourgeoisie in the Balkans' and their 'present capitalist relations'. The Balkan bourgeoisie was declared not capable of creating a Balkan federation because of its 'dynastic, autocratic and militaristic' character.

At the Vienna conference of the Balkan Communist Federation in 1921 the Bulgarian communists were represented by Vasil Kolarov, secretary of the BCP, and Dimitrov. The major questions at this stage were what exactly should the role of Moscow be in the federation and which parties should be affiliated with the federation. Kolarov argued against the affiliation of the Austrian and Hungarian parties and reasoned his objections by stating that these parties represented countries with too different economic and ethnographic structures.⁷¹ As Rothschild points out it is very doubtful that Kolarov really had in mind the ethnic or economic homogeneity as a prerequisite to membership in the communist federation, as the Greeks shared neither the economic development of the Bulgarians nor were considered to be of Slav origins. It would be more convincing to assume that Kolarov was afraid of bringing into the federation new pretenders for the leadership.

However the reassurances of the Comintern representative that the Balkan federation would not be turned into a mere function of Soviet Russia did not convince the Yugoslav representatives who questioned the centrality of Moscow. Also Yugoslav

communists disagreed that the federation should be subordinated to the main purpose of fighting the Anglo-French influence in the Balkans as stated by Comintern. Their idea was to build up a Balkan federation with more power in the hands of the Balkan communists themselves and more focused on Balkan affairs as opposed to Soviet strategy. From the point of view of Moscow the Bulgarian communists were adhering firmly to the principles of communist internationalism, meaning accepting strict control from Moscow, whereas the Yugoslavs were not. Communist internationalism in the context of the BCF was understood by the Comintern and supported by the BCP as political subordination of the various communist parties to the centre. Cooperation among the Balkan communist parties was of secondary importance to the cooperation with the Soviets.

The conference worked out a detailed structure of the federation. It reflected the way the different communist parties members of the federation were supposed to be accountable to each other and to Moscow. The main principle of the structure was declared to be 'democratic centralism'.⁷² At the core of the structure was the Balkan communists' action in conformity with the resolutions of the Comintern. Most importantly there was a clause included according to which member parties were to be represented *individually* at Comintern congresses and *not* by the Federation as an unified body. As Rothschild asserts, this prevented any possibility for forming a 'Balkan block within the Comintern.'⁷³ This organisational structure did not work in favour of improving the international relations in the Balkans but rather became a source of quarrels among the constituent parties, which at the end dissolved the BCF. The founding slogan of the

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 229.

⁷² Ibid., p.230.

⁷³ Ibid., p.231.

federation as the Balkan's united revolutionary power soon gave priority to the national questions in each of the respective countries.

In 1922 at the conference in Moscow the Balkan Federation declared its support for autonomy for Macedonia, Thrace, and Croatia within the future federation of Soviet style republics.⁷⁴ Now the communist parties were declared defenders of national minorities in their struggle for independence. Although the idea of autonomy was by no means new to the idea of a communist federation, the situation in the Balkans was different. The respective communist parties were weakened by the pressure of the respective governments on them during the 1920s. The autonomy idea was riven by the controversies of Balkan politics, which communists parties had little control over. Most importantly autonomy for Macedonia was understood as an independent and united Macedonian Soviet-style republic, which was to become a member of the Balkan Federation as opposed to autonomy for each Macedonian part in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece. Here the Bulgarian communists' position became of decisive importance for the BCF.

Moscow saw the Bulgarian communists as their most faithful comrades. Concerning the decisions of the Berlin Congress of 1878, the most painful national question for Bulgaria after the liberation from Ottoman rule, Moscow's Bolsheviks supported the revisionist ambitions of Bulgaria by professing that Bulgaria had a legitimate claim over parts of Macedonia, Thrace and Dobruja. Such support was hotly opposed by other parties of the federation, except for the BCP: 'In the case of Macedonia, the BCF decided that the proper solution to the problem was the establishment of a united and independent Macedonia rather than the granting an autonomy by each of the three Balkan states

involved in its slice of Macedonia. This program... suited the interests of neither the Greek nor the Yugoslav Communist Parties.⁷⁵

The quarrel between the Bulgarian, Greek and Yugoslav parties over the Macedonian question revealed to a great extent the communists' views on how the national questions were to be solved in the Balkans. Whereas the Greek and Yugoslav parties rejected the call for autonomous Macedonia, Bulgarian communists insisted that this was the only correct solution according to communist principles. Kolarov accused the Yugoslav communists of having committed serious mistakes on the national question by not aiming to destroy the then Yugoslav state.⁷⁶ He proclaimed that the unity of several nationalities in the Yugoslav federation was not in the spirit of communist internationalism because the national problem of Yugoslavia was essentially a peasant problem, which could not be solved by federative arrangements. Kolarov, supported by Stalin himself, asserted that the Yugoslav communists should support separatist movements within Yugoslavia so as to dismantle the Yugoslav state in the name of creating a larger Balkan state unit in which each constituent part was to be controlled by Moscow directly. According to this model each of the communist states participating in the Balkan federation would be homogenised on the basis of working-class and peasant unity. Kolarov underlined that national questions in USSR were 'completely solved' and there was 'full national equality' illustrated in 'national in form, socialist in content' culture, which was developing.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.232.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 242.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 244-246.

⁷⁷ Vasil Kolarov, 'Istochniyat pakt i makedonskoto natsionalno dvizhenie' in Spero i slovo za bulgaro-suvetskata družba, (Sofia: Ministerstvo na informatsiata i na izkustvata, 1947), pp. 162-164.

When BCP leaders spoke of Bulgarians in Bulgaria, Macedonians in Macedonia or Slovenes in Yugoslavia they assumed that these were ethnically homogenous groups, which would serve as a basis for national homogeneity merging the working class and the peasantry. Also the Balkan communists involved in the communist federation referred to the populations of the respective countries both as majorities and minorities at the same time: they were considered national minorities when discussed in the context of any larger political power – e.g., the Ottoman or Austro-Hungarian empires or the Yugoslav state – and viewed as national majorities in the independent Balkan states. Macedonians were considered a minority within the Yugoslav state and a majority in a future Macedonian autonomy. In all cases in the context of a future Balkan federation communists did not discuss the issue of other people living among the main nations of the Balkans, namely their ethnic minorities.

At the eighth conference of the BCF in 1929 it was officially accepted that the Executive Committee of the Federation had no right to interfere in internal party affairs. At the same time the central control of Moscow was reaffirmed. Yet it became apparent that the idea of the communist federation could not be revived as each of the member parties went in different directions. The Balkan countries entered a new era of the so-called *rapprochement* and the Balkan governments took over Balkan politics. The new spirit of negotiation rather than confrontation overwhelmed the official inter-Balkan relations. The only legal communist party in the Balkans at the time was the Greek one, and in 1935 it dropped the federation slogan for autonomy for Macedonia and Thrace. In 1937 Tito became the leader of the Yugoslav communists and he changed the course of the Yugoslav communist politics as he favoured Macedonia as a unit of Yugoslavia.

The Macedonian question was central to Bulgarian foreign policy throughout the pre-Second World War period. On one hand Bulgarian governments of this period had to deal with the other Balkan countries which had a stake in Macedonia, and on the other hand they had to deal with the Macedonian movement within Bulgaria. Bulgarian relations with the USSR in this matter were of primary importance. The general tasks of the mainstream Bulgarian political parties after the Berlin Congress in 1878 were: a) to ensure that the Christians of Macedonia considered themselves Bulgarian (which was contested by Greeks and Serbs), b) to work for their liberation from Ottoman rule, and c) to reunite them with Bulgaria.⁷⁸ In Bulgarian mainstream politics the question of Macedonian unification became also a question of Macedonian autonomy. But whenever Bulgarian political parties, Liberal or Conservative, wanted autonomy for Macedonia it was seen as a stage on the way to unification with Macedonia.

During the rule of Stefan Stambolov, who was a left-wing Liberal (1887-1894), Serbia attempted to offer division of Macedonia, which the Bulgarians refused. Stambolov believed firmly that the long-term policy of Bulgaria should be unification with Macedonia, but he also believed that this should be achieved by well-organised Bulgarian foreign policy rather than revolutionary methods. This was the main reason for the regime's strict measures against the Macedonian movement in Bulgaria. Also Stambolov's regime worked to obtain concessions from Turkey over Macedonia rather than to make alliances with other Balkan countries. During his time relations with Russia were quite strained mainly around the issue of recognition of Ferdinand as a Bulgarian monarch, but also Russia supported Serbia's territorial claims in Macedonia in accord

⁷⁸ See Richard J. Crampton, Bulgaria 1878-1918: A History, (New York: Columbia University Press), East European Monographs, Boulder, 1983), p. 81.

with its own Balkan policy and effectively entertained the idea of the ultimate division of Macedonia.

Apart from the Bulgarian socialist movement, the Agrarians also envisioned the solution of the Macedonian problem through the creation of a Balkan confederation. The most prominent Bulgarian Agrarian leader, Alexander Stamboliiski, was devoted to the achievement of peace in the Balkans through the creation of a union for the Balkan states.⁷⁹ He professed egalitarian ideas about the power of the peasantry. In his theory peasants were defined as small holders and private property owners. He viewed that socialists and communists alike perverted the essence of Bulgarian society by denying the primacy of the peasants.⁸⁰ In his foreign policy Stamboliiski remained known for signing the Treaty of Neuilly in 1919 which meant severe territorial losses for Bulgaria including in Macedonia. Therefore Stamboliiski was seen by the Macedonian movement as surrendering the unity of Bulgaria and Macedonia for a Balkan union.

Yet his support for a Balkan union was different from the BCF's. Stamboliiski adhered to the idea of a 'Green International', which was a body consisting of peasants parties, supposed to be the nucleus of a federation of Eastern European peasant states.⁸¹

Stamboliiski's idea was that a Green International of peasant parties would lead to the creation of a Green Entente of peasant states as a counterpoint to both the West and Russia. The Green International was about an international peasant solidarity with a utopian character. In political terms it did not focus on political organisation nearly as much as the supporters of the BCF and never actually declared the creation of a state

⁷⁹ See Rothschild, The Communist party of Bulgaria, pp.85-116.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 88.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 95.

(federal or other) as its aim. Instead it spoke of a union in terms of moral solidarity. The Green International was supposed to represent the peasantry as such on a political level as opposed to the communists who aimed to merge them with the workers. In difference to the BCF it never had a strict rule of members being accountable to a centre and was more associated with the idea of connecting local identity with the nation.

Stamboliiski did believe that the best policy for the Central and Eastern European peasant states was one of balance between the industrial West and the Bolshevik East, both alien to 'peasantism'. He considered himself a follower of Lenin only in terms of being a social innovator. Although he thought that the communists were immature and self-indulgent proletarian-industrialist theorists, who knew nothing about reality, he still praised them for being anti-bourgeoisie and favoured their revolutionary attitude.⁸²

Concerning the Macedonian question, the prevailing opinion among his supporters was in favour of Macedonian autonomy, which would eventually be part of some kind of a Balkan confederation.⁸³ But Stamboliiski's views differed from those of the Bulgarian Socialists who advocated a Balkan federation under the leading role of the proletariat, which Stamboliiski could not accept.

The role of the peasantry in Bulgarian society was also decisive in the split within the Bulgarian socialist movement. In 1890s the newly formed Bulgarian Worker's Social Democratic Party (BRSDP) experienced the first separation of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Union (BSDU). BSDU was for peaceful improvements in social and economical life rather than for immediate preparation for a proletarian revolution. The split in the BRSDP in 1903 into 'Narrow' and 'Broad' socialists was in relation to these

⁸² Ibid., p. 112.

⁸³ See Crampton, Bulgaria 1878-1918, pp. 335-337.

disagreements. The 'Broad' socialists led by Sakuzov were for political democracy as a necessary stage in the transformation of the society into a socialist one. Therefore, they argued that the socialist movement should co-operate with other left-orientated political forces. The Narrow socialists led by Blagoev stood for purely working-class policies and refused to co-operate with any other political force, including the Agrarians.

Shortly after the failure of the September uprising in 1923 organised by the communists, the BCP was banned by the Bulgarian government. This encouraged those communists who aspired to the use of violence. As a result of their activities, which culminated in the assassination attempt to kill the king and his aides in 1925, the Bulgarian communist movement was repressed severely and until the mid 1930s, when Dimitrov's idea about the Popular Front was imposed, remained internally divided. With the *coup d'état* of 19 May 1934 which established the regime of Colonels Damian Velchev and Kimon Georgiev the communists were marginalised completely. The ambition of the new government was to free Bulgaria's foreign policy from the terror of the Macedonian movement, which it achieved successfully. The Macedonian question was firmly in the hands of the new regime, with *rapprochement* with Yugoslavia as the first objective in its foreign policy. The establishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union was a continuation of the general line for promoting a strongly centralised authoritarian Bulgaria supported by great powers in international politics. The BCP's underground existence strengthened its conspiratorial character and gave priority to tactical considerations above theoretical debates. The BCP had to accommodate itself to the new conditions which the war brought into Bulgaria and most significantly the occupation of Macedonia by the Bulgarians in 1941. Its views on nationalism and internationalism were to be tested by relations with the League of Yugoslav Communists (LYC) and the Soviets over the question of who was to control the communist resistance in Macedonia.

Although the idea of a Balkan federation was not rejected, it was postponed and priority was given to more urgent tasks facing the Balkan communist parties during the war.

After the end of the Second World War Moscow changed its line in relation to the BCF and took a pragmatic stand according to which it supported the Yugoslav communists' aspirations as they fought German Hitlerism harder than the Bulgarians. At this point the Yugoslavs were in general more interested in the idea of a unified Macedonia as part of Yugoslavia on the first place and in their own dominance of any Balkan federation. In September 1944 Yugoslav communist leaders negotiated with the Bulgarian communists about giving Pirin Macedonia cultural autonomy as a step to the unification of Macedonia. However this did not imply that there would be a closer union between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The main question was to whom should a united Macedonia belong to? There were strong disagreements within the BCP about the policy of an autonomous Macedonia according to which Macedonia may join Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia started negotiations for a Bulgarian-Yugoslav federation during which Bulgaria insisted that the two countries should be equal members whereas the Yugoslavs envisioned Bulgaria and Macedonia as being both constituent parts of the Yugoslav federation. The idea of the federation continued to be discussed and became a major issue at the Bled conference between Tito and Dimitrov in 1947. There Dimitrov insisted that Macedonia could be unified only within the broader strategy of creating a federation. But no agreement was reached on the immediate transfer of Pirin Macedonia to Yugoslavia, though it was agreed that Macedonian culture should be promoted there by Yugoslavs.

Dimitrov's policy was dictated by his beliefs in communist internationalism as the guiding principle of communist inter-state relations. He favoured Macedonian autonomy as a temporary stage of its incorporation in a larger federation in accord with Marxist-

Leninist principles. On the other hand however Dimitrov stood for Macedonia retaining its historical links with Bulgaria. He thought that this could be secured in a Balkan federation. Here Dimitrov made a concession to the original ideas of communist internationalism – as followed strictly he should not have been concerned which way Macedonia was to enter a Balkan federation, through Bulgarian or Yugoslav participation, since both were communist countries. But at this stage he saw the idea of a Balkan communist federation as a protection of Macedonian - Bulgarian connections based on the history of the Macedonian question as part of the Bulgarian historical struggle for national unity – not simply as a way of both nations joining the world-wide communist revolution. At the same time Dimitrov remained loyal to Moscow's line even though it was obviously dictated by the desire to control the communist countries as opposed to co-ordinate their united revolutionary action. In this way Dimitrov was labelled somewhat unfairly by Bulgarian nationalists as a 'betrayal' of the Bulgarian national interests in relation to the Macedonian question as he tried to balance communist internationalism with Bulgarian nationalism rather than seeing the relationship between them as irreconcilable.

VII. Bulgarian Stalinist Tradition

Under Stalin Bulgarian communists devoted their efforts to defining the 'politically correct' line of the party and ostracising those elements which did not follow it. In their writings they relentlessly reasserted loyalty to Marxism-Leninism as demanded by Stalin but restrained from expressing their own opinion directly. The fear of being accused of being in service to the 'enemies' of communism, and the Stalinist show trials, made everyone aware that sharing thoughts could be highly dangerous

During Stalinism the BCP made significant changes in its policy, most notably in relation to the Macedonian question. The BCP reversed its policy and denied the existence of a Macedonian national minority in Bulgaria. As Crampton argues, during Stalinism the major threat to communism was seen to come from external, imperialist forces and this was reflected in policies towards Bulgaria's minorities. The Bulgarian Stalinist leader Vulko Chervenkov aimed to limit internal diversity in order to eliminate 'foreign claims upon Bulgarian citizens'. But whereas the Macedonian problem could be saved from such claims by asserting that there was no Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, other minorities' issues could not.⁸⁴

Like Blagoev and Dimitrov, Chervenkov was also educated in USSR. He was Secretary General of the BCP (1950-1954) and was renounced by the April plenum of the party in 1956. In his speeches Chervenkov spoke about the 'patriotic unity of the Bulgarian working people', as deriving from their 'rallying ever closer around the Communist Party' based on Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin's thought. In his understanding of patriotism Chervenkov put the emphasis on the Sovietisation of the Bulgarian economy and the

collectivisation of land which he promoted. In relation to external factors concerning communist Bulgarian foreign policy, which he claimed, was 'in the national interests of our homeland', he severely criticised Tito and his policies for being 'subservient to American imperialists' and betraying the ideas of communist internationalism.⁸⁵

Chervenkov focused on the 'consolidation' of socialist Bulgaria as unifying the working class with the countryside under the banner of a 'militant Marxist-Leninist' approach with 'an iron discipline'. He professed total penetration of Marxist-Leninist and Stalinist principles in all spheres of life and total loyalty to the Soviets in order to build up a 'monolithic socialist state'.⁸⁶

A more developed approach towards nations and nationalism is to be found in Todor Pavlov's writings. Pavlov was a major party ideologist during Stalinism and wrote

⁸⁴ See Crampton, A Short History, p. 174.

⁸⁵ See Vulko Chervenkov, Seventh Anniversary of Bulgaria's Liberation from Fascism and Imperialist Yoke: Report delivered at the official meeting held on September 8, 1951 at the National Theatre, (Sofia: 1951).

⁸⁶ See Vulko Chervenkov, Report of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party to the Sixth Congress of the Party, (Sofia, 1954). More about Chervenkov's views on nationalism can be derived from the report he assigned in 1948 on behalf of the BCP to be written by the historian Tushe Vlahov on Bulgarian historiography, which he judged to be correct. Vlahov asserted that according to Marxism history was determined by economics and in these terms 'Bulgarian society was essentially a class society from medieval times'. On the Macedonian question, Tuhov stated that the idea of an independent Macedonia supported by the Bulgarian communists was construed in opposition to Bulgarian chauvinism rather than as a solution to the problem as such. See Tushe Vlahov, 'Sustoianie i zadachi na bulgarskata istoricheska nauka: Stenograma No.46 ot suveshtanieto na istoritsite, organizirano ot Komiteta za Nauka, Izkustvo i Kultura za obsuzhdane na sustoianiето na istoricheskata nauka', in Vera Mutaftchieva (ed.), Sudut nad Istoritsite: Bulgarskata Istoricheska Nauka. Dokumenti i Diskusii 1944-1950, (Sofia: Izdatelstvo Marin Drinov, 1995), vol. 1., pp. 203-282.

extensively on questions of Marxist-Leninist philosophy trying to apply their approach to all fields of life. Pavlov felt no need to clarify his interpretations of Marxism or Leninism presumably because he was an authority of the highest order in Bulgarian communist theory during the 1950s. He discussed nations and nationalism briefly as part of his critique of bourgeois philosophy. According to Pavlov nationalism was an exclusively bourgeois theory. He often used the terms nation and class interchangeably as he spoke about patriotism, which he stated , was a concept deriving straight from Marx and Engels' ideas. Marxist scientific theory, Pavlov asserted, gave the only true explanation of patriotism as determined by high level of development of the forces of production. He claimed that Soviet patriotism was the only model to be followed and it rested on three factors: economics, social structure and the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. Further on he asserted that Lenin developed the idea of a homeland as a 'social, political and cultural environment, where the respective people, the respective class, lives'.⁸⁷ Pavlov argued that Soviet patriotism and proletarian internationalism were two sides of the same coin linked by the 'dialectical unity' reflecting the most positive intellectual thought as 're-worked by Marxism'.⁸⁸ He drew a sharp line between working-class patriotism and bourgeois nationalism and thought that although the bourgeoisie could under certain circumstances express patriotic feelings, the working class could under no circumstances be nationalistic.⁸⁹ In this line he claimed that the Bulgarian bourgeoisie had a nationalistic approach towards Macedonia, whereas the BCP had a patriotic and internationalist attitude. Pavlov used the term 'national federation' as the solution for the Macedonian question as opposed to 'anarchy federation'. According to him the former was national revolutionary movement whereas the latter aimed towards 'individual freedom'. By this

⁸⁷ Todor Pavlov, Izbrannic Filosofskie Proizvedenia, p.147-148.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 154.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

he meant that Macedonia should be united as a nation within a communist federation, not just in any federation (particularly not with Serbia alone). Similarly to Dimitrov he insisted that Macedonia may be granted autonomy only if it was to be in one federation with Bulgaria.

VIII. The 'Advanced Socialist Society' of Bulgaria

In 1956 at the so-called April plenum of the BCP, the first secretary of the Central Committee, Todor Zhivkov, delivered a report that reflected decisions of the 20th congress of the Soviet communist party under the leadership of Khrushchev.⁹⁰ The focus of the report was the rejection of the 'personality cult' implemented by the BCP under the leadership of Vulko Chervenkov. The plenum has been held since as a formal recognition of the process of de-Stalinisation in Bulgaria. The main features of the so-called April line for the future development of socialism in Bulgaria were outlined: resurrection and consolidation of Leninism in the party rule as opposed to Stalinism, further development of collective democratic principles, expansion of the material base of the socialist socio-economic society as well as more freedoms for intellectuals and creativity. The April line was supposed to mark the end of the period of transition from capitalism to socialism and the beginning of the advanced socialist society in Bulgaria.⁹¹

Although Khrushchev condemned Stalin for his policies on nationalities in the USSR, no issues of nations or nationalism were mentioned in the BCP party documents discussing the April line. The emphasis was on the initiative to broaden the proletarian internationalism of the BCP, which was the major force in the 'growth of the might of the world socialist system'. This was to be done under the leadership of Moscow through

⁹⁰ At the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in his 'secret speech'(Feb. 24-25, 1956) Khrushchev denounced Stalin. The speech was the hallmark of a far-reaching de-Stalinisation campaign intended to destroy the image of the late dictator and to revert official policy to a Leninist model. The 'cult of personality' that Stalin had created to glorify his own rule and leadership was condemned by Khrushchev.

⁹¹ See Politika potvurdena ot zhivota: 20 godini ot Aprilskia plenum na BKP, (Sofia: Partizdat, 1976).

expanding relations with capitalist countries on the basis of 'peaceful coexistence' and developing friendly relations with her Balkan neighbours Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia.⁹² The April line offered a more open-minded approach to culture and tolerated intellectual dissent to a limited extent. Yet no theoretical revisions were to be made, certainly not in the Bulgarian Marxist-Leninist approach, which continued to be quoted as the only source of party policies. However in accord with the revival of 'true' Leninist principles in the USSR, the emphasis was placed on Lenin as the major innovator of Soviet and international socialism. The name of Stalin was removed altogether from textbooks on communist history.

At the 10th congress of the BCP in 1971 the party programme declared that Bulgaria has entered 'the highest and the last stage of the development of socialism as the first phase of the communist formation'. The main features of this stage were defined as follows: 1) self-sufficient socialist society developing on its own as state and co-operative forms of property merge into each other, 2) 'socialist society steps on the threshold of social homogeneity', 3) the state under the dictatorship of the proletariat becomes a public state (*obshtonarodna durzhava*) and the communist party becomes a party of the entire people (*partia na tselia narod*).⁹³ The programme served as the basis for promoting the new Bulgarian constitution adopted during the same year, 1971, in Bulgaria. As Zhivkov himself said, adopting it meant 'approval of the road to the future, for the building of an

⁹² See Todor Zhivkov, 'Bulgaria's International Status and its Foreign Policy Tasks, 1966' and 'A Historic Contribution to the Consolidation of the Unity of the International Communist Movement, 1969' in Todor Zhivkov, Unity on the Basis of Marxism-Leninism: Speeches, reports, articles, (Sofia Press), (no year indicated), pp. 41-65.

⁹³ See Programa na Bulgarskata Komunisticheska Partia, (Sofia, 1971).

advanced socialist society in Bulgaria.⁹⁴ The main focus of the 1971 constitution was on further centralisation of the political power of the BCP. On nationalism or nationalities there was very little said though it was mentioned that the Turkish population has been successfully acquiring a socialist consciousness.⁹⁵ Zhivkov clarified several points of the programme and above all he underlined that it was in accord with the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and its scientific approach: 'Our conceptions of democracy and freedom are Marxist-Leninist and to us freedom is a conscious necessity and democracy is conditioned by social development.' 'In Bulgaria', he continued, 'there are no antagonistic class relations and there are 'genuine equality and fraternity of all members of society' which are the prerequisites of communism. The further extension of the rights and freedoms of Bulgarian citizens were to be found in the 'enhancement of their socialist consciousness'.⁹⁶ Zhivkov also used rather vague terms like 'the moral unity of the Bulgarian people' or 'Bulgarian people as a whole' to underline the consensual character of the constitution. In his speeches and articles there was never an indication that political centralisation implemented in the new constitution may require further ethnic homogenisation. He put an emphasis on the concept of the advanced socialism in Bulgaria as the 'fundamental basis of freedom' for all citizens.⁹⁷ However Zhivkov briefly mentioned the topic of nationalism in his remarks about the history of the BCP. He underlined the correctness of Blagoev and Dimitrov's views on Marxism as the only 'correct ideology' He stated that the BCP adhered to them even during the Second World

⁹⁴ Todor Zhivkov, 'Bulgaria has a new Constitution: Speech at the 16th Grand Session of the National Assembly, May 18, 1971', in Todor Zhivkov, Bulgaria Along the Road to an Advanced Socialist Society, (Sofia: Sofia press, 1971), p. 497.

⁹⁵ See Poulton, Hugh, The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict, 2nd ed., (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1993), p. 105.

⁹⁶ Zhivkov, Bulgaria Along the Road to an Advanced Socialist Society, p. 499.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 500.

War when the situation was 'particularly complex' in Bulgaria because there was a 'speculation with national sentiments' carried by the bourgeoisie under the 'illusion of national ideals': 'In those hard times, our Party manifested its ability to combine the struggle for national independence and democracy with the struggle for socialism' led by 'genuine Marxism-Leninism'.⁹⁸ Zhivkov had in mind the anti-Hitlerist position of the BCP led under the slogans of proletarian revolution.

Further on Zhivkov defined the transformation of the working class as 'emancipation' on the road to advanced socialist society and stated that Bulgaria has been developing as a 'socialist nation' whose interests were in harmony with the interests of the world working class and in the common struggle against capitalism and imperialism in the world. This required 'fidelity' to Marxism-Leninism against all forms of opportunism, right-wing or left-wing revisionism.⁹⁹ Thus the advanced socialist society in Bulgaria was defined in working-class terms based on developed forms of production and under the leadership of the communist party as the 'people's party' acting inseparably from the Soviet power. It was clearly stated that Bulgaria was a socialist state uniting its citizens by their socialist consciousness.¹⁰⁰

The ideas of the Bulgarian advanced socialist society were further developed by Zhivkov's daughter, Liydmilla Zhivkova. She had a more systematic approach towards the relationship between Marxism-Leninism and Bulgarian nationalism. It was based on aesthetics of culture and arts and the role of the individual rather than the collective in

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 534.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 537.

¹⁰⁰ This concept of the socialist citizenship served as a platform for demanding respect for human rights when the BCP pursued policies of ethnic nationalism during the 1980s.

the advanced socialism. She offered an understanding of communist Bulgaria as a cultural nation. Bulgaria was defined above all as a unique culture, which by entering the stage of advanced socialism was further perfecting its uniqueness. During the period of advanced socialism Bulgaria was to find its own place in the world civilisation through the resurrection of its glorious past. Zhivkova was a great believer in the cultural capacity of the Bulgarians who as citizens of advanced socialism were to become 'harmoniously developed' people perfecting themselves as future communist citizens mainly through learning about culture and art, which were supposed to release new creativity.

Zhivkova claimed that her approach rested on Marxism-Leninism and believed that the aesthetic aspect of this theory were undermined in the socialist world. According to her Marx, Engels and Lenin's aspiration to create a better world was based not only on economical and political advancement but also on perfecting the spirit of humanity. According to her the communist revolution in Bulgaria was a movement of people empowered by their great cultural heritage. Aesthetic education was needed to fulfil Marx's vision about creating a communist society. In Marx's terms, she argued, communism creates a 'rich and versatile human being, deep in all his feelings and perceptions' as well as 'human feeling which would correspond to the whole wealth of human and natural essence'.¹⁰¹ Zhivkova asserted that to 'transform reality in accordance with communist aesthetic ideal' was 'the most accurate formulation of the question, one which completely corresponds to the spirit of Marxism'. Practical activities of people, she asserted, should be infused with aesthetics, because 'socialist labour' and even more so 'communist labour' is a 'form of manifestation of beauty' according to Marxism.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Liydmilla Zhivkova, Perfecting Man and Society, (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1980), p. 108.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 115.

By putting emphasis on what she called 'the spiritual' content of the Bulgarian culture Zhivkova revised the Bulgarian Marxist-Leninist tradition, which underlined the materialistic approach to culture. She believed that Lenin developed Marx and Engels' ideas further as he led the proletarian revolution in a historic epoch when socialism was winning in Europe, Asia and Latin America. Under the banner of Leninism, she asserted, Bulgaria was transformed from a backward country into a 'developed industrial and agrarian socialist state'.¹⁰³ But what she saw as Lenin's major contribution to the proletarian revolution was what she called his idea about 'the development of socialist material and spiritual culture which presupposes and requires the socialist cultural revolution to 'absorb within itself' all values of the 'world cultural treasure-house'.¹⁰⁴ It is a matter of speculation how the BCP would have viewed her approach to Marxism-Leninism if she had not been the daughter of the Bulgarian communist leader or how he – who viewed intellectual endeavour with scepticism and suspicion – would have treated somebody like her otherwise. Yet it is certain that it would have been with less admiration. Although it would be an exaggeration to call her a dissident within the BCP, Zhivkova certainly was the first communist Bulgarian leader to articulate openly the ideas of cultural nationalism as a theory aspiring to mobilise Bulgarian national pride.

In her speeches Zhivkova always mentioned Bulgarian-Soviet friendship as the focus of the BCP's internationalism. She asserted that due to the everlasting co-operation between the BCP and the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) Bulgaria participated in the development of mature socialism on an international level. But her innovation in the context of internationalism was not maintaining the supremacy of Bulgarian-Soviet friendship but in her involvement in the international peace movement, and women and

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 443.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 440.

children's initiatives. According to Zhivkova the origins of the peace movement were to be found in the ancient philosophers who sought the meaning of life in intellectual endeavour, which later on were transformed into actual movement by Lenin: 'The Peace Decree, that first appeal for the peaceful unity of the people on our planet which was signed by Lenin, from the building, from the renewal of life, from the creative constructive power of the resurgent millions of people raising their voices in the name of social justice, of freedom, of development and the future.'¹⁰⁵

Zhivkova believed in the universality of the peace movement and her own initiative, the International Assembly 'Banner for Peace', was carried out under spiritual slogans such as: 'Ours is the Sun! Let all the people follow us, we are the beginning'. She used the very same vocabulary when defining the aims of her involvement with the affairs of children: 'To enjoy the sun, to dream of far-away worlds, to feel creators and builders - this is the right of every child and of all children.'¹⁰⁶

Apart from such statements being in sharp contradiction with the dry language used by most party officials, Zhivkova was unusual in her activities accompanying her theoretical convictions. Her association with the peace movement gave her the opportunity to speak often at the United Nations and UNESCO as well as to establish connections with peace activists from Western Europe. Her activities involving children's problems created her image as a western-type charity orientated public persona. Thus Zhivkova's internationalism, though in theory dedicated to Bulgarian-Soviet co-operation, in reality placed her in quite a different context. She often spoke about the brotherhood of the socialist states, but her activities in the peace movement focused to a great extent on

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 369.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 370.

recruiting audiences in the West, though interestingly enough not from the western communist parties. Her first official visit abroad (after having studied in England in 1970) was not to the USSR but to Paris, where she opened the exhibition of Thracian Art in 1974 as a First-Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Art and Culture. Between 1974 and 1981 she paid visits to the USSR only four times, always as a head of a Bulgarian cultural delegation. Moreover she never promoted Bulgarian art there but rather preferred to exhibit it in the United States. The personalities she chose as symbols of her initiative to live according to the 'laws of beauty' and called 'standard bearers of human progress' included Leonardo da Vinci, V.I. Lenin, Cyril the Philosopher¹⁰⁷, Rabindranath Tagore¹⁰⁸, Einstein, Avicenna, Jan Komensky¹⁰⁹, Goethe. One could not help noticing that Soviet culture was not the first on her list.

¹⁰⁷ Cyril the Philosopher was one of the two brothers who created the Slavonic alphabet.

¹⁰⁸ The Bengali poet, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, and is generally regarded as the outstanding creative artist of modern India.

¹⁰⁹ Czech educational reformer and religious leader, remembered mainly for his innovations in methods of teaching, especially languages. He favoured the learning of Latin to facilitate the study of European culture.

IX. Conclusion

Bulgarian communist thinking on nationalism in relation to communist internationalism was driven by loyalty to the Soviets, who had the final say over national questions in Bulgaria until the mid 1980s. Also the BCP theory was originally conceived as radically different from any thought which claimed understanding of society including interpretations of Marxism and Leninism not accepted as correct by Bulgarian Marxists. Bulgarian communist thinkers refused to engage in any serious debate with 'rival theories', nationalism among them. The thought of Marxism-Leninism became 'the Bible' of Bulgarian communism from which quotations were extracted to legitimise all subsequent applications of 'Marxist-Leninist' theory. Responsibility for resisting all 'revisionist' ideas as well as asserting the 'politically correct' interpretations was centralised in the hands of the communist party and from there disseminated through the writings of party ideologists and historians.

But how important really was the BCP's declared doctrine? Did it lead to actions or rather was it used to justify whatever the party policy it wanted to promote at any given time? In general Bulgarian communists either simplified theory by reducing it to a set of rules or avoided debate altogether. But of course they did not simply open the works of Marx, Engels or Lenin at random in order to decide what to do. Rather they focused on coordinating their actions with the basics of theory. And if the theory of Marxism-Leninism did not dictate their policies literally, it defined the main directions through which decisions were made. At the centre of communist power in Bulgaria was the affiliation to Marxism-Leninism as a source of legitimate political power.

According to Marxism-Leninism the BCP viewed that the Bulgarian nation, as the majority nation, should be the basis of a highly centralised and industrialised state. On the question of where there would be a place under communism for national identities other than Bulgarian national identity, the fathers of Bulgarian Marxism-Leninism left no clear theoretical opinion. The concept of 'the socialist citizenry' was supposed to unite all members of society in their political identity but it was not clear if this would mean forcible cultural assimilation of ethnic minorities. Bulgarian communists used Marx and Engels' assumption that communist leadership was by definition internationalist-minded and could not profess nationalism in relation to the Macedonian question. They argued that as communists their policy was dictated by communist internationalism – though this was not entirely so even before Tito's split with Moscow, which allowed the BCP to change its course on the Macedonian question.

During the 1950s Bulgarian communists favoured Stalin's idea that national questions could be solved only according to the political expediency of historical circumstances and that national minorities which did not make compact entities could not have any special rights within the political state, though if they formed an entity they should have linguistic rights. Thus Turkish education flourished during Stalinist times in Bulgaria. Also the broad application of the Stalinist idea that ethnic conflict could be solved by resettlement provided a theoretical justification for the BCP policy of encouraging emigration of ethnic minorities with theory.¹¹⁰ Ethnic minorities' emigration was also encouraged according to Stalin's focus on imperialism as the enemy within and without. Bulgarian Stalinist ideologists viewed internal diversity as dangerous.

¹¹⁰ Stalin proposed resettlement as a solution to ethnic problems within USSR.

The de-Stalinisation of the BCP culminated in the idea of ‘the advanced socialist society’ which continued to favour the high centralisation of the state under the full dictatorship of the proletariat according to Marxist-Leninist principles. But centralisation was to be achieved by total ethnic homogenisation of the Bulgarian nation, which excluded loyalty to the state unless based on loyalty to Bulgarian ethnicity. During the 1970s and 1980s in particular the BCP articulated the theory of Bulgarian cultural nationalism evoked to inspire the Bulgarian citizens on the road to achieving full freedom and democracy. At this stage Marxism-Leninism became little more than a formula attached to the party line.

Chapter 3: Communist Myths and Bulgarian Nationhood

1. Introduction

Communism sought to offer a new mythological system to the Bulgarian people.

Communism claimed that it changed history and created new symbols and rituals, which were to be remembered as historical. This chapter analyses Bulgarian communist mythology and the way it interacted with the concept of the Bulgarian nation. This study assumes that each political and social system creates its own mythology and that myth is one of the main elements of national identity.¹ As such, communist mythology is an essential part of the dynamics between communism and nationalism. The myths of communism are examined in relation to Bulgarian national mythology. The interaction between communism and nationalism on the level of mythology reveals how communism understood and used national traditions for its own purposes. The symbols and rituals of the communist state constructed the mythological cosmology of communism. They are perceived as active expressions of myths. The symbolic presentation, as well as the ritual practices of state power, are seen as a bridge between the public and the private spheres, which provides people with coherent identity.² The main question to be addressed here is whether communism succeeded in constructing a

¹ See Anthony Smith, National Identity, (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

² See Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return: or, Cosmos and History, Williard R. Trask (tr.), (Great Britain: ARKANA, Penguin Group, 1989), John A. Armstrong, Nations before Nationalism, (Chapell Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982) and Bogdan Bogdanov, Promianata v zhivota i texta: Retorichni eseta za trudnostite na preobrazuvaneto, (Sofia: Otvoreno Obshtestvo, 1998).

meaningful mythological system and how did it which relate to people's identity. There are two main political figures in the history of Bulgarian communism, which became powerful symbols of communist power: Todor Zhivkov, who remained in power for most of the 45 years of communist rule in Bulgaria, and his daughter Liydmilla Zhivkova, who saw her political mission in reviving the indigenous Bulgarian national mythology. These political personas made a specific effort to use national mythology in order to construct communist myths, symbols and rituals.

Bulgarian communist mythology consisted of two main groups of myths: the old Bulgarian myths re-invented by communism, and the new communist myths. All myths tried to conceptualise the Bulgarian nation and state. The declared intellectual norm of Bulgarian communism was the Marxist-Leninist paradigm according to which history, not mythology made people's identity. Yet during the 45 years of communist rule, the Bulgarian national mythos was actively used in the study of history. But it was modified according to the theoretical demands of communism and in order to match the Soviet line. This study argues that under communism Bulgarian national mythology was highly politicised. Assessing the framework of this politicisation of the national mythology helps to understand why and when communist mythology generated political action in relation to nationalism.

In general communist myths were met with scepticism because they lacked cohesiveness and were imposed. Communism tried to reinvent Bulgarian history in order to support its own mythology. The pre-communist set of Bulgarian national myths was redefined to fit into the communist idea of mythology. The myth of the unified Bulgarian ethnic nation, the myth of the Russian liberation, the Greater Bulgaria myth, the myth of suffering and redemption, the myth of the civilising mission of the Bulgarians, and the

myth of the long-standing tradition of ethnic tolerance - all of these were specified in the context of the communist idea of modernity. The myth about the antiquity of the Bulgarian language, which is closely related to the myth about the civilising mission of the Bulgarians, was reinterpreted in the myth of great communist education. The interpretation of the Ottoman past remained the most important part of the myth of unjust treatment, whereas Russian cultural presence became the symbol of Bulgarian-Soviet friendship. Communism also claimed that Bulgarian tolerance towards ethnic differences was based on the belief in class equality. Bulgarian people were mythologised as saviours of the Jews and protectors of other national minorities. Yet although Turks, Muslims, Roma and Jews were all proclaimed as equal citizens of the Bulgarian communist state they were at the same time excluded from the communist symbols and rituals. Moreover the myth of the Turks and/or Muslims being the traditional enemy of the Bulgarian people was used to justify the policy of their assimilation and expulsion. Jewish life under communism was turned into a symbol of Bulgaria as a nation of saviours. But at the same time the BCP carried out a policy of assimilation towards the Jews and aimed to eradicate them as a separate ethnic group.

II. The Civilising Mission of the Bulgarian People

Two major events in Bulgarian history inspired the myth of the civilising mission of the Bulgarian people: the mass conversion of the Bulgarian populace to Eastern Orthodoxy in 864, which was initiated by Tsar Boris, and the devising of the Cyrillic alphabet by the brothers monks Cyril and Methodius around the same time. According to the national mythology Bulgaria became a nation when the religion and the language of the Bulgarian people were officially institutionalised. Communism as an atheist ideology had to deal with the religious aspect of the national mythology. Communism claimed that religion was a tool in the hands of the class oppressor to keep the masses ignorant. Religion was seen as a sign of backwardness, which the 'socialist class consciousness' (*socialisticheskoto samosuznaniye*) had to overcome. According to the classical communist view Bulgarian involvement with Christianity was a thing of history. Marxism understood the development of society as an evolutionary process and associated religion with the primitive mind of the early stages of humanity. According to this view religion in Bulgaria was a necessary step in the development of the society but at the same time a negative historical experience. Further on communism stated that the bourgeoisie used religion to obstruct the political development of the people and keep them ignorant. Communism was said to have broken away from religion in a revolutionary manner. The commitment to political change was supposed to erase religious beliefs. Bulgarian communism saw religion along these lines. Religion was said to have deceived the Bulgarian peasantry while decadence overwhelmed the educated urbanites. All questions of religion were linked to the history of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Communism declared that the church was a religious body and by definition implied social regress. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church was like any other church in the world and historically

supported the politics of authoritarianism.³

Such was the theory behind Bulgarian Marxist-Leninist thinking until the 1970s.

Afterwards Bulgarian communism started to promote a slightly different approach towards religion. While religion as such was still considered to be a sign of backwardness, the role of religion in Bulgarian history began to be reviewed. The definition of religion changed. From being essentially a theological outlook, religion was defined as a historical phenomenon. The new official line was that religion in Bulgaria became part of social and political life in response to the foreign domination the country was subjected to for many centuries. This was a major breakthrough in the communist theory about religion in Bulgaria. The approach then became that religion had a very specific historic role and was not simply an expression of political conservatism, as asserted previously. The significance of this attitude was that it offered space for accepting that religion was part of the collective history of the Bulgarian people. The history of Bulgarian Christianity became to be seen mainly as a defensive mechanism of the Bulgarian nation against the Ottomans who brought the foreign faith of Islam to the country. Bulgarian communist historians began to define religion as the 'ideology of the Bulgarian people' acting 'in defence of the nation'.⁴ In this the very meaning of religion was redefined as a political movement rather than a spiritual faith. The shift in the approach towards religion showed clearly that communism aspired to connect to the past even when it was obviously against its very principals. It seemed that communism permitted a very small degree of religiousness but this had a very serious intellectual impact. The concession to

³ Mihail Andreev and Dimitur Angelov, Istoria na bulgarskata feodalna durzhava i pravo, (Sofia: Nauka I Izkustvo, 1972), p. 95.

⁴ Petur Petrov, Sudbonosni vekove za bulgarskata narodnost: kraia na XIV vek - 1912 godina, (Sofia: Nauka I Izkustvo, 1975), pp. 46-51.

religion fractured the shell of Bulgarian communism as an atheist ideology and acknowledged that the Bulgarian nation had a religious consciousness.

On the level of national mythology religion has been inseparable from the Bulgarian language. Religion and church were about disseminating the ideas of national awareness through language. Moreover the old myth had it that the greatness of the Bulgarian language was in its mission to spread culture among the Slavic people. According to the myth Bulgarian language was at the very heart of the Slavonic culture, which in its own turn was mythologised as universal. Communism strongly promoted the myth of the civilising mission of the Bulgarian people. But at the same time the communist myth was not simply a continuation of the old belief in the great Bulgarian language culture. Communism reorganised the old myth of the civilising mission of the Bulgarian language by introducing the Soviet connection to the myth of the civilising mission of the Bulgarian people. The starting point was that Soviet greatness was expressed in the Russian language. The main reason which made it possible to promote the idea that Bulgarian was also a great language was that it was closely related to the Russian language. Bulgarian communism suggested that the linguistic relation between the two languages was part of the ideological alliance between Bulgaria and the USSR. It was also asserted that at the bottom of the language connection was the myth of the Bulgarian people being overwhelmingly ethnic Slavs related to the Russians. The Soviets developed the theory that the process of the 'Slavonising' of the Bulgarian nation was a historical development. Accordingly Bulgaria was part of the 'Eastern European Slavonic world'.⁵ Soviet scholars made it very clear that the Slav identity was the identity of political progress. In contrast any relations to the Oriental world in a very broad sense were held

⁵ N. S. Derzhavin, Lektsii po Bulgarska istoria, (Izdatelstvo na Bulg. Rabotnicheska Partia (Komunisti), 1946.

as a sign of political backwardness. This theory was so prominent during Stalinist times that it was suggested that the Bulgarian-German alliance during the Second World War was because of the Turkic-Tatar element in the origins of the Bulgarians.⁶ In general Bulgarian communist historians accepted this theory. The Slav ingredient of the Bulgarian nation was said to be superior to the so called proto-Bulgarian element. It was said that the Bulgarian bourgeoisie tried to undermine the Slavic element in the foundation of the Bulgarian nation by developing the so-called 'hunska teorija' (Hun theory).⁷ The idea behind this claim was to underline the Slavonic character of the Bulgarian communist nation. Most importantly presenting the Bulgarian culture as an ethnic relative of Soviet Russia legitimised the Bulgarian communist identity both as a national and Soviet identity at the same time. This satisfied the national aspirations of Bulgarian communism without risking to contradict the Soviets. There was also an additional reason for the success of the myth of the greatness of Bulgaria as a Slavonic culture. Bulgarian communism preferred to be acknowledged as a Russian-based Soviet ideology rather than to be considered a relative of Yugoslavia, which was the other Balkan communist country with substantial claim of being a Slavic culture. In view of the complicated relations between Moscow and Tito, Bulgaria's place nearer to the Soviets seemed much safer. The communist myth of 'Slavonic Bulgaria' portrayed the country as the antique centre of Slavonic literacy. It described the old Bulgarian language, the so-called Church-Slavonic language, as the main language of the Orthodox world. Bulgaria was mythologised as the roots of Slavonic culture. The myth held that the Bulgarians' special mission was to give language to all Slavs.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 11-20.

⁷ Mihail Andreev & Dimitur Angelov, Istoria na bulgarskata feodalna durzhava i pravo, (Sofia: Nauka I Izkustvo, 1972), pp. 69-76 and Petur Petrov, Preface. Izbrani Proizvedenia. By Alexander Burmov, (Sofia, BAN: Institut za Istoria, 1968), vol. I., pp.

At the centre of the myth was the legend about the creators of the Cyrillic alphabet, Cyril and Methodius, who were persecuted by the enemies of Slav culture and received protection in Bulgaria. From this point Bulgaria became the protector of the Slavonic world, and the dissemination of Slavonic literacy began in Bulgaria. The question of the actual ethnic identity of the two brother monks has been disputed by the three main countries claiming the cultural heritage of Thessaloniki, where they were born: Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece. Under communism Bulgarian scholars asserted that they were Slavs by origins. But because Bulgaria offered them asylum she became their mythical homeland. The Cyrillic alphabet was upheld as the ethnic heart of the Bulgarian nation: 'Cyril and Methodius finalised the Slavonisation of the old-Bulgarian culture and ethnic community.'⁸ According to the myth of the civilising mission of the Bulgarians Cyril and Methodius gave written language not only to the Bulgarian people but also to the rest of the Slavs: 'Bulgaria was called upon to defend the right of all Slavdom, its right to national independence, to its own cultural development. ... It was the Bulgarian language which became for many centuries the common language of Slav scholarship.'⁹ Essentially the myth was about the greatness of the Bulgarian nation. But this greatness was presented as an extension of the Slavonic world. Thus Bulgarian communism related to Soviet Russia, which was undisputedly the centre of the Slavonic universe, as the legitimate perpetuator of the old Bulgarian myth:

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⁸ Alexander Fol, Vasil Guzelev, Nikolai Genchev, Konstantin Kosev, Ilcho Dimitrov, Andrei Pantev, Milcho Lalkov and Kostadin Petrov, Kratka istoria na Bulgaria, (Sofia: Izdatelstvo Nauka I Izkustvo, 1981), p. 54.

⁹ Vera Mutaftchieva and Nikolai Todorov, Bulgaria's Past, (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1969), pp. 27-28.

*We, too, in this world have performed a good deed,
Given all Slav peoples the books they read.¹⁰*

¹⁰ Ivan Vazov, 'Paissy', in Selected Poems, Peter Tempest (tr.), (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1976), p. 40.

III. The Long Suffering of the Bulgarian Nation

Communism had to give its own interpretation of the myth about Bulgaria as the long-suffering nation under Ottoman rule. This was the strongest myth of modern Bulgaria. The myth was all about Bulgarian nationhood, its survival under the long years of foreign domination, heroic struggles against it and the involvement of the outside world in the process of achieving national independence. The most remarkable feature of the communist version of this myth was how little effort was actually made to interpret Ottoman domination as a result of class conflict. According to communist theory, foreign rule should have largely been seen as an expression of class conflict. Bulgarian communism made a very significant concession to ethnic nationalism by reinforcing the myth of the long suffering under the Ottomans. Bulgarian communist history underlined that ethnicity was the core of the mythical oppression. Bulgarians were subdued and made to suffer because of being Bulgarians. Bulgarian life under the Ottomans was described as life under the 'Turkish yoke' (*tursko robstvo*). Consequently having been part of the Ottoman empire was equalised to having been enslaved by Turks. The term 'Turkish yoke' became the most powerful symbol of the communist myth of the long suffering of Bulgaria under the Ottoman time. The term itself was coined in 1889 by the author of what is considered the first Bulgarian novel, *Under the Yoke*, by the Bulgarian national writer Vazov.¹¹ The significance of the mythologising of the Ottoman times as years of 'Turkish' rather than 'Ottoman' domination presented the confrontation between the Christians and the Ottomans as a struggle of the Bulgarian nation against the Turkish nation. Thus the distinction between Ottomans and Turks was reduced to a

¹¹ See Ivan Vazov, Under the Yoke: A Novel in Three Parts Taken from the Life of the Bulgarians in the Eve of Their Liberation, Margarita Alexieva & Theodora Atanasova (trs.), Marko Minkoff (ed.), (Sofia, Narodna Kultura, 1955).

minimum.

This process was greatly helped by the political realities of the cold war. Turkey, being a member of NATO, was an enemy state to the entire communist bloc, including Bulgaria. But at the same time the cold war was not the only reason for the encouragement of the anti-Turkish rather than anti-Ottoman attitude under Bulgarian communism.

Communism used the old perception of Islam as a threat to the Bulgarian nation and politicised it as a menace of the Turkish people against the Bulgarian nation.

Communism focused on the events surrounding the Ottoman invasion of the Bulgarian lands and the consequent five centuries years of Ottoman rule (1393-1878). According to the myth, the Bulgarian state was destroyed by the Ottomans and Bulgarian national development impeded. The communist myth remembered all these years as ages of darkness and horror. The myth of the long suffering of the Bulgarian people served to emphasise the sacred nature of the Bulgarian national territory. Bulgaria was not only the space where the Bulgarian nation was born, but also the place where the Bulgarian people suffered under foreign rule. The Ottomans subjected the Bulgarian nation and state to endless hardship and Bulgarians sacrificed their lives in the name of the survival of the nation during these dark ages. This myth was about the collective national martyrdom of the Bulgarians. On the level of national mythology Bulgarian history was interpreted both as a passive and an active process. On one hand, the Ottoman period was a time of stillness when Bulgarian life stopped and Bulgarian people lost control over their development. Bulgarian life under the Ottomans was perceived as being on the verge of ethnic extinction. The nation was barely surviving and waiting to be 're-born' at a later time. On the other, the myth described Bulgaria under foreign rule as a nation united in a heroic struggle against the Ottomans. The Bulgarian warriors (*baiduti*)

organised the national resistance and fought for social justice. The consequent struggle for national independence was led by the Bulgarian church and the organised revolt of April 1976 (*Aprilskoto vustanie*) was the culmination of the Bulgarian national movement under the Ottomans. The myth glorified the leading role of the national consciousness in the Bulgarian survival under Ottoman rule. The myth of the long suffering of the Bulgarians was particularly important in communist mythology because it became the intellectual basis for the BCP policy towards the Bulgarian Turks during the assimilation campaign of 1984-85.

Turks were declared the historic enemy of the Bulgarian people who had no place in communist Bulgaria. The myth was recalled to justify the communist policy towards the Bulgarian Turks. Thus the communist mythology was politicised and prepared the background for the ethnic violence, which erupted in the country during the forcible campaign. In general when myths are recalled to justify political action what actually happens is that the past is seen as a part of the present. This is possible, as Kempferer argues, because myths communicate between time and space, and mythologised suffering in the past starts living in the present.¹² The power of the myth of the long suffering of the Bulgarian people was proved by its capacity to make people experience the national mythical past in the present, which was officially a non-national communist time. During the anti-Turkish campaign the BCP directed the myth of long suffering to mobilise public opinion in defence of its policy. The Bulgarian people were 'invited' to experience their mythological past as a suffering nation and to act according to it in the present. The BCP stated that the myth was the historical truth, which had to be resurrected in order to

¹² See Bruce Kempferer, Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), p.213.

correct the mistakes of the past. The main 'mistake' which the Bulgarian people were subjected to was the forcible Islamisation of the Bulgarian Christians in the Ottoman empire. This was a very central event in the Bulgarian myth of the long suffering. The idea behind the mythical event of the forcible Bulgarian Islamisation was that the foreign rulers aimed to destroy the Bulgarian nation. Communist history indulged in passionate descriptions of the myth. One of the most eloquent history writers under communism developed the concept about 'enforcing Islam' on the Bulgarian people (*nalagane na isliama*) and asserted that Bulgarians were subjected to 'annihilation', 'abduction', 'resettlement', 'exile' and 'Turkicisation'.¹³ Communism declared that this was wrong and the time had come to do justice. Thus Bulgarian communism changed dramatically its original aim to liberate Bulgarian people from class oppression and assumed the role of being a missionary and a guardian of the Bulgarian national identity.

¹³ Petur Petrov, Sudbonosni vekove za bulgarskata narodnost: Kraia na XIV vek - 1912 godina, (Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1975), pp. 87-121.

IV. The Bulgarian Revolutionary Nation and National Revival

The communist myth of the Bulgarian revolutionary nation was built around the old myth of the 19th century movement for the national Bulgarian Revival (*Bulgarsko Vuzrazhdane*). Essentially the national myth was focused on the idea of the cultural resurrection of the Bulgarian nation, which became the intellectual core of the revolutionary struggles for political independence at the end of the 19th century.

Communism interpreted this myth from two points of view. First it was declared that the driving force of the national revival was the Bulgarian bourgeoisie. This interpretation was according to the communist view that all political movements were driven by class struggle. Yet at same time the national revival was the single most important political movement in the modern history of Bulgaria. The communist idea was to reclaim the myth of the Revival as part of communist history. Therefore the Bulgarian Revival was mythologised in a new fashion as an internationally minded revolutionary force rather than a nationalist movement. The communist intellectuals asserted that the 19th century Bulgarian Revival was a pre-communist revolutionary movement for social justice and aimed to eradicate class oppression.¹⁴ This approach was obviously ridden by deep contradictions. It aimed to satisfy the communist theory of revolution and the national history at the same time.

In historical terms, the Bulgarian Revival was mainly a movement for the independence of the Bulgarian church. As Crampton argues, the Bulgarian Revival was primarily a

¹⁴ See Dimitur Blagoev, Prinos kum istoriata na sotsializma v Bulgaria, (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata Komunisticheska Partia, 1949), p.50 and Georgi Bakalov, Izbrani istoricheski suchinenia, Zhak Natan & Alexandur Burmov (eds.), (Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1960), pp. 348-350.

cultural comeback and its biggest achievement was the creation of a separate church in 1870. He also notes that this date may be considered as the date of the birth of the Bulgarian nation, although the nation-formation and the state-formation may be different processes.¹⁵ Indeed the Bulgarian Revival was focused on the idea of the nation as a cultural unit, which should be mobilised for political action. The main difficulty communist mythology had was how to square the struggle for church independence within the claim that the Bulgarian revival was a class revolution. The communist myth's approach was to be highly selective.

The most significant mythical figure of this national renewal was Paisi Hilendarski. He was a monk who wrote the historical text mythologised as the first Bulgarian history called *Istoria Slavianobulgarskaia* (1762). Paisy, as he became known in the Bulgarian national mythology, was a romantic nationalist, who called for the Bulgarians to be reawakened, to come to terms with their past, and to know who they really were. He saw Bulgarian language as the first step towards national awareness and his writing stressed the uniqueness of the Bulgarian people. Communist history chose to underline the linguistic aspect of Paisy's message, which was in harmony with the myth of the civilising mission of the Bulgarian people, discussed above. Paisy was defined as the man of the Enlightenment for the Bulgarian people (*narodnen prosvetitel*). The question of his religiousness was made to seem irrelevant and somehow diluted in comparison to the significance of his role as a teacher of Bulgarian cultural advancement.

The communist myth of the Bulgarian Revival until the 1970s emphasised the revolutionary character of the Bulgarian culture and undermined its religious aspect. But

¹⁵ See Richard J. Crampton, A Short History of Modern Bulgaria, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 17.

later, communist writers reviewed the myth of the Bulgarian Revival and made some significant concessions to nationalism. Two books written during communism on the Bulgarian Revival became most significant in this process: *The Bulgarian National Revival Period* by Nikolai Genchev published for the first time in 1977 and *Bulgarskiut Velikdeni i Strastite Bulgarski* by Toncho Zhechev, which appeared in 1980.¹⁶ The former is a study of the history of the Bulgarian Revival and the latter is a romantic history written in the style of literary essay. Both authors are prominent Bulgarian intellectuals. The idea behind these two works was to revise the communist version of the Bulgarian Revival from the point of view of national history. Both books claimed that the Bulgarian struggles for church independence should continue to be seen as part of the reactionary bourgeoisie machinery. But they both also sought to reconcile the Bulgarian revolutionary movement with the historic role the church played in it. Genchev and Zhechev attempted to disconnect the church movement for independence from its religious content and present it as a secular movement for national independence. Because religion was such a strong part of the traditional understanding of the Bulgarian national identity and so obviously against the communist principles the Bulgarian church was acknowledged as a leader of the national liberation but only out of the necessity to fight the foreign Ottoman rulers.

The most important concept of the time in relation to nationalism was again introduced by Genchev. This was the idea that the Bulgarian revolutionary tradition of the 19th century was indeed a national revolution and developed in harmony with the bourgeois revolutions in Europe. Such an understanding of the Bulgarian revolutionary tradition was a serious breakthrough in the previous communist interpretation of the Bulgarian

¹⁶ See Toncho Zhechev, *Bulgarskiut Velikden ili strastite Bulgarski*, (Sofia: Narodna Mladezh, 1980).

history, which denied that Bulgarian bourgeoisie may have played any positive role in Bulgarian history. Genchev suggested that Bulgaria shared the ideals of the French revolution as well as the ideas of the Russian revolution of 1917.¹⁷ The idea that the pre-communist bourgeois Bulgaria, which had not been exclusively orientated towards Russia or the Soviet Union, may be seen as inseparable from the Bulgarian history and cultural tradition was a considerable step by communism towards nationalism. This interpretation of the Bulgarian revolutionary movement gained enormous popularity among the Bulgarian intelligentsia in the late 1970s and during the 1980s because it gave priority to the role of the nation in Bulgarian history. Genchev's name became a synonym for dissent in the younger generation of communist historians because in his writing Bulgarian history and mythology appeared uninterrupted and endowed the Bulgarian nation-state independence with European values. And this of course was in contradiction with the original mythological idea of Bulgarian communism that 'real' Bulgarian independence began with the establishment of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in the People's Republic of Bulgaria. Genchev also made one more significant contribution to the communist myth of the Bulgarian revolutionary myth. He declared Vasil Levsky, the main hero of the Bulgarian national liberation, the voice of radical views in the spirit of European democracy. Levsky's beliefs were essentially European, argued Genchev. He proclaimed that Levsky's vision of the post-Ottoman Bulgaria as a 'moral and sacred republic' (*'chista i sviata republika'*), where all nationalities in Bulgaria, including Turks, Jews and others, would enjoy equal rights in every respect, was the Bulgarian expression of the ideals of the French revolution.¹⁸ It was indeed an extraordinary statement to make under Bulgarian communism - that Levsky, as a symbol of the Bulgarian struggle for national liberation, the core mythological hero of the Bulgarian revolutionary movement, may be

¹⁷See Nikolai Genchev, The Bulgarian National Revival Period, (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1977).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 143.

viewed as an European type of revolutionary rather than Russian.

The interpretation of the Bulgarian Revival being in harmony with Europe's traditions marked a significant change in the communist mythological paradigm. The communist myth moved quite far away from its original construct. The Bulgarian Revival, from being a bourgeois movement and driven by class conflict, came to be understood as a great achievement of Bulgarian nationalism and driven by nationalism itself. Thus communism redefined the Bulgarian revolutionary tradition as an European minded national bourgeoisie revolution and stated that the final aim of this revolution was not the overthrow of capitalism but rather the assertion of the Bulgarian nation. The new communist myth was that during the 19th century Bulgaria was re-born as a national state in European fashion as opposed to being perceived as a backward 'eastern' type of country.

V. The Bulgarian Liberation

Bulgarian communism constructed its own liberation mythology. The starting point was that communism in general claimed that it was a revolutionary movement aiming to liberate the whole world from class oppression. The myth of the communist liberation was created around the Russian revolution of 1917 and the role of the Red Army in the liberation of the countries of Eastern Europe, including Bulgaria. The myth about the Soviet liberation was a new myth, which communism aimed to incorporate into the broader Bulgarian national liberation mythology. Self-evidently this myth was new because it was constructed around the most recent events of Bulgarian history at the end of the Second World War. But most importantly the communist myth of the Bulgarian liberation was about the liberation of the Bulgarian people from the oppression of capitalism. This myth was built upon the idea that the liberation of Bulgaria was to be found in the freedom from class oppression as opposed to the pre-communist liberation mythology, which focused on the struggles against foreign rule with the final aim of establishing the Bulgarian nation-state. The communist myth of the Soviet liberation held that Bulgaria aspired to build Soviet-style communism in the country. Bulgarian communist mythology focused on the story of the Soviet liberation in 1944.¹⁹ But the new myth also sought continuity in the old pre-communist Bulgarian liberation myth about the Russian army liberating Bulgaria from Ottoman rule. Communism connected to the old myth in order to reinforce the new one. The complexity of this interaction on the level of mythology is an illustration of communist aspirations to incorporate the communist myth of liberation into the old Bulgarian national mythology. Generally speaking liberation myths relate to the idea of the antiquity of the nation. Liberation

¹⁹ See Crampton, A Short History, pp. 124-134, for an account of the actual events of the Soviet troops entering Bulgaria.

mythologies concentrate on that particular time when the nation, which has been subjected to oppression, has been restored and returned to its original order. But the myth of the Soviet liberation could not mean the restoration of the old order because it brought the communist revolution, which denied the previous life of the country as far as it was not aiming to proletarian revolution. On the contrary it was about radical, revolutionary and irreversible change. The Soviet liberation was supposed not only to become the main myth of the new Bulgaria but also a symbol of rejection of the old bourgeoisie order of the country, which was declared reactionary and bound to die.

The most problematic questions the myth had to face was who exactly liberated Bulgaria and from what? The main difficulty was that the answers were highly ambiguous. The key to the success of this myth lay in the degree of its coherence. Communist mythology had to describe the actual politics of the Soviet arrival in Bulgaria but they were very complicated and very hard to generalise. Kertzer argues that successful myths are usually highly coherent and based on clarity. According to his theory ambiguity of myths of political power may be quite dangerous, because it 'gives way to open conflict about the meaning of the rites. In such cases, rather than producing political unity, the rites can become just another battleground.'²⁰ This condition of uncertainty describe very well the myth of the Soviet liberation in Bulgaria. During the entire period of communist rule in Bulgaria public opinion was divided on the question of the Soviet liberation. It was mostly though not solely the communist establishment which believed in the myth. The rest of the Bulgarian people by and large understood the Soviet intervention as a manoeuvre of political power. Thus instead of uniting the country the myth of the Soviet liberation actually divided it. There was also another level of complexity of the

²⁰ David I. Kertzer, Ritual, Politics and Power, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 71.

communist liberation myth. It was in the myth's dual structure. On one hand, it was about the Soviet renewal of Bulgaria, but on the other it could not escape the association with the pre-communist myth about the Russian liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottomans. The old myth of the Russian liberation was about national independence whereas the new communist myth of the Soviet liberation was about further liberating the country from class oppression. The former had the advantage of being clearly established as a national myth while the latter was still striving to become one. The obvious link between the old and the new myths of liberation in Bulgaria was Russia. One way or another the image of Russian intervention in the Bulgarian liberation mythology remained its unchanging component. In the pre-communist national mythology the Russian-Turkish war of 1878, as a result of which the Ottomans withdrew from the Bulgarian lands, was the war of the Bulgarian national liberation. The lack of officially established Bulgarian military structures made Russia the leading force of the Bulgarian liberation from the Ottomans historically.²¹ At the core of the myth of the Russian liberation of Bulgaria was the belief that Russia intervened on behalf of the oppressed Bulgarians because they were her Slavic brothers. This belief was an old one and based on the idea that Bulgarians and Russians speak similar languages and have a common religion. The myth conceptualised the view that Bulgaria deserved to be helped because of the origins of the Bulgarian nation, which were Slavic and Orthodox. The Russian role as the big and powerful protector of the small Bulgarian nation also became mythical. Russian protection was said to be primordial and blessed by God himself.

Bulgarian communism did not make any substantial changes in the mythical Russian role in the Bulgarian struggle for national independence against the Ottomans. The only point which needed clarification was the claim that at the eve of the withdrawal of the

²¹ See Crampton, A Short History, p. 19.

Ottomans, Russia was actually in pursuit of power in the Balkans. According to this theory there were Russian geopolitical interests behind its intervention. Communism did not consider this version seriously, although occasionally it was noted in the history books that at the time Russia was a tsarist empire. Communism embraced the myth of Russia as a Bulgarian liberator, which was rooted in the cultural, and ethnic ties in particular, between the Bulgarian and Russian people. This part of the Bulgarian liberation mythology has remained successful after the end of communism. It resonates strongly with the Bulgarian ethnic majority of the country and continues to be seen in opposition to the Ottoman domination.

The desire of the communist myth of the Soviet liberation to relate to the old myth of the Russian liberation was well illustrated by calling the Russians 'dual liberators' (*povtorni osvoboditeli*). But in 1944 when Bulgarian communism came to power the Soviet liberators operated on a very different level. What was constructed in this case was the juxtaposition of Russia as the liberator of Bulgaria from the foreign enemy, the Ottomans, whereas the Soviets were said to have freed the country from the 'enemy within' - Bulgarian capitalism. The main difference became the issue of the Bulgarian nation. The myth of the Russian liberation was about the national independence of Bulgaria, whereas the myth of the Soviet liberation was about the national division of Bulgaria along the lines of class identity. According to the communist myth the Soviet liberation was about freeing the Bulgarian proletariat from the rule of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie. Thus communism introduced a new meaning of liberation itself into the Bulgarian national mythology. The theory of communism required the reconstruction of the concept of freedom as a component of national independence but aiming towards the proletarian revolution. The main purpose of the new communist myth of the Bulgarian liberation was to legitimise the communists' coming to power in Bulgaria.

Accordingly Bulgarians were liberated from the monarchist-fascist Bulgarian government and freed to build a national state though this was not declared to be the final aim of the communist revolution. At this stage class consciousness was supposed to be the new unifying principle of the nation-state, which was also to lead to the transformation of the entire world. Communism tried to mythologise itself as the desired political regime in Bulgaria, which was to free the Bulgarian proletariat and turn it into a driving force of social progress .

At the same time the myth of the Soviet liberation incorporated an element of Bulgarian national participation in the process of the establishment of the communist power in the country. It held that the Soviet liberation was supported by a mass native movement, led by the local Bulgarian communist antifascist fighters. These were the Bulgarian partisans, which in the myth fought side by side with the Soviets in the communist battles.

According to the new myth, they were underground warriors, ready to sacrifice their lives in order to free the country from the burden of class conflict. Partisans and their supporters on the ground (*iataks*) were introduced as the heroes of the new communist mythology. The names of the partisans and places where their battles took place were included into the Bulgarian communist history and mythology. Many towns, villages, streets, schools, military units, kindergartens were named after them in order to turn them into everyday symbols of communist power. In general battle myths strengthen the identification with the nation and historical battle myths are about 'heavenly glory over earthy power'.²² Communism tried to create its own war mythology, which was to fulfil this purpose. The most important myth of the communist battles was declared to be the

²² George Schöpflin, 'The Function of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths' in Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (eds.), Myths and Nationhood, (London : C. Hurst : in association with the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1997), p. 30.

September 1923 antifascist uprising. It was mythologised as a popular mass revolt against the Bulgarian capitalist rulers.²³ And here lay the failure of the myth. Communist history represented it as a revolutionary action supported by the Bulgarian people. But in fact far from being a mass action, the September uprising was initiated by one communist group directed from Moscow. It affected parts of north-western Bulgaria and several other regions in the country. The uprising ended in failure, being put down within one week, with many some prominent left-wing intellectuals killed. But if it did not bring any direct political changes it did serve to radicalise the Bulgarian communist movement.²⁴

Thus the communist mythology tried to mythologise events with a high degree of political ambiguity and too soon after they happened. The September uprising was hardly an event which could have solidified the myth about the massive involvement of the Bulgarian people in the communist battles, although the scale of the anticommunist terror in Bulgaria in its aftermath should not be underestimated. Again the problem with this myth was the way it conceptualised the Bulgarian nation as divided between communists and anticommunist and at the same time claimed that the native communist revolution was a mass Bulgarian movement. The myth of the Bulgarian communist battles was built upon this idea of the divided nation. It is worthwhile to compare briefly this myth with the older myth of the Bulgarian revolt against the Ottomans during the uprising of April 1876. The myth about the April uprising was the main symbol of the Bulgarian liberation movement from the Ottomans. It was constructed around the idea of the Bulgarian national liberation from the 'foreign' oppressor (Bulgaria against the Ottoman empire), whereas the myth about the September uprising was about the

²³ See D. Kosev, Hr. Hristov, D. Angelov, Kratka istoria na Bulgaria, (Second ed.), (Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1966).

²⁴ See Crampton, A Short History, pp. 100-102.

‘internal’ oppressor of Bulgaria (Bulgarian communism against the Bulgarian bourgeoisie rulers). The difference between this major communist war myth and the old national myth was best illustrated by the degree of resonance with the Bulgarian public. For instance the martyrs of the legendary massacre in Batak during the April uprising in 1876 provoked deep feelings of national suffering in the Bulgarian culture. The national poet Ivan Vazov immortalised it in his ‘Epic of the Forgotten’ (*Epopeia na zabravenite*), which remains undoubtedly one of the most popular Bulgarian literary works.²⁵ The ‘martyrdom’ of the September uprising of 1923 was fictionalised by many communist writers and also had its success. Geo Milev’s epic poem ‘September’ (*Septemvri*) has also been highly valued as a poetic achievement of Bulgarian symbolism.²⁶ But its success could not match the influence of Vazov’s work in Bulgarian cultural history. This was not because it lacked imagination. The reason was that ‘September’ appropriately depicted Bulgarian communist battle mythology in fragmented poetic fashion whereas Vazov concentrated on the sacrifice of the Bulgarian nation in the name of the national unity alone. Moreover after the fall of communism, the glorification of the national liberation heroes of the April uprising grew stronger, whereas the communist war mythology was shaken by demythologising processes.

Additionally Bulgarian communism had to maintain the supreme position of the Soviets in the war mythology. The BCP’s subordination to the Soviets postulated this rule. Therefore the communist mythology had the Bulgarian communist battles and heroes as an original achievement of the Bulgarian people, but always in balance with Soviet

²⁵ ‘Epic of the Forgotten’ by Ivan Vazov is a cycle of twelve poems commemorating heroes of Bulgaria’s renaissance and liberation struggle. For a selection of the poems see Vazov, *Selected Poems*, pp. 28-45.

²⁶ See Geo Milev, ‘Septemvri’ in *Izbrani Proizvedenia*, Georgi Tsanev, Lamar and Leda

supremacy. According to the myth the Bulgarian partisans were Bulgarian communist heroes but the liberation was possible because of the Soviet leadership's help. This was in opposition to the old national myth which had it that Bulgarians were martyrs of their own revolutionary tradition greatly helped but not subdued to Russian leadership. The myth of communist liberation reflected this constant balancing out of the Bulgarian and the Soviet elements. Bulgarian communism had its own war mythology but its strength was only second to the best. The communist myths of liberation were less nationalistic in their content than the myths of the Bulgarian national liberation. But the tension between the communist and the national mythical realities was the real reason for the weakness of the new myth about the Soviet liberation of Bulgaria. For myths are rarely defeated by historical truth. They normally fail because of being unable to compete with counter-myths. From this point of view the myth of the Soviet liberation was overshadowed by the old myth of the Russian liberation and the myths of the communist battlegrounds were weaker than the myths of the wars of national liberation. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the traditional Russian components of the Bulgarian liberation mythology were underlined at the expense of the Soviet connection in the myth of the communist liberation. Common religion and culture continued to be upheld as symbols of the Bulgarian love for Russia, but the Bulgarian communist involvement with the Soviets became a symbol of national betrayal. Most of the Soviet liberation memorials, which were erected all over the country, did not survive the fall of communism in 1989. The great number of stone engraved Soviet soldiers and Bulgarian partisans holding guns became silent witnesses of the failure of the communist mythology. In contrast the memorials of the Russian liberation remained largely untouched and widely celebrated as a triumph of Bulgarian independence. The arguments over them were often politicised but almost always the public opinion was

Mileva (eds.), (Sofia: Bulgarski Pisatel, 1955), pp. 63-78.

that things Russian have merit beyond communist ideology.

There was another aspect of the myth of the Soviet liberation which played a role in this process. The myth about communism as the most desired political, social and economic system for the Bulgarian people competed with the myth about communism being imposed by the Soviets in Eastern Europe. This myth was much less important in Bulgaria in comparison to other communist countries, Poland in particular. Still the fact that the history of the Second World War was strictly censored from this point of view as well as the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 undermined the historical foundations of the myth of the Soviet liberation in Bulgaria.

The time factor was also crucial for the failure of communist mythology. The communist arrival to power was difficult to glorify, because the actual events were too recent. The celebrated events and legendary heroes were less of a history than a living memory. As Eliade asserts, recollections of historical events survive in popular memory for some time, generation or two, before they are turned into myths: 'Myth is the last, not the first stage of the development of the hero'.²⁷ The communist mythology lacked the distance of time which was required to turn the memory into mythology.

Communism stated that it was the totally new ideology of the future but at the same time it claimed a mythical past. In this way communist myths had not only to compete with the old national myths but also to rework the very recent memories of events, which undermined the credibility of the communist mythology. For the arrival of communism divided Bulgarian society rather than uniting it as was claimed. Communism tried to build a mythology about the communist revolution as a popular and desired revolutionary act.

But the communist violence, the elimination of the monarchy and the disputed electoral success of the communists in the early years of its power in Bulgaria, as well as the perpetual use of intimidation and coercion to extract support, undermined its success.²⁸

Nevertheless the myth of the Soviet liberation of Bulgaria was not seriously challenged, and lasted until the last days of Bulgarian communism. This myth was common for the Eastern European countries, except for Yugoslavia, which had a different liberation myth. What made the Bulgarian case distinct was that regardless of the undermining factors, the myth of the Soviet liberation was less objected to than in the rest of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The events of 1956 in Hungary and 1968 in Czechoslovakia, which ultimately destroyed the myth of the Soviet liberation, showed that the Bulgarian connection to Soviet power was very strong.

But why was the Soviet liberation myth so successful in Bulgaria? The answer to this question is to be found in the overlaps of the communist and national mythology, which made the myth more coherent than in the rest of the countries of the Soviet bloc. First of all on the level of myth, the Soviet Union saw Bulgarian communism as an important asset because of the strategic position the country had in the Balkan region. The myth had it that the Soviet interests in Bulgaria were largely based on the geo-political importance of Bulgaria as a bridge between the East and the West. This idea was actually an update of the old perception of the Russian engagement in Bulgarian affairs, which was dictated by strategic interests and brotherly feelings. From this point of view the Red Army liberated Bulgaria because the country had an important role to play in the Soviet Union's foreign affairs. This concept was a continuation of the old myth of the Bulgarian

²⁷ Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, p. 43.

²⁸ See Crampton, A Short History of Modern Bulgaria, pp.152-158.

importance in the life of Russia. Bulgarian communism mythologised this importance which was built upon the national myth of Russia 'the big brother'. Another factor for the relative success of the communist liberation myth was the achievements of the Bulgarian Sovietisation. Bulgarian membership in the economic union of the socialist bloc, Comecon, the annual fairs of technological innovations promoting Bulgaria as an advanced and technologically sophisticated society second only to the Soviets, as well as its status as an ally of the Soviet military might, supported the myth about Bulgarian communism's success on an international level. Being part of the Soviet bloc acquired the meaning of being able to compete on a world level. This gave a serious boost to the Bulgarian national confidence. The myth was created that communist Bulgaria equalled famous Bulgaria. Second the Sovietisation of Bulgarian education was declared as a great communist achievement. The myth was built that the introduction of the Soviet educational system gave Bulgaria the chance to make an enormous intellectual progress. This communist myth was largely successful because it actually remodelled the old national myth about the cultural advancement of the Bulgarian people discussed as the myth of Bulgaria's civilising mission. The cultural expansion of Bulgaria was an old and central value of Bulgarian nationalism. Thus the myth about the greatness of Bulgarian communist education corresponded with the national mythology and this seriously facilitated its success.

The Sovietisation of Bulgarian education under communism included the idea that Russian culture was an inseparable part of the Bulgarian tradition. During the 1950s, the Bulgarian alphabet was changed to make it as similar to the Russian as possible. The reform was supposed to be a symbol of the expansion of the cultural closeness of the two cultures under communism. The Sovietisation of the Bulgarian language was drastic. But most importantly it provoked very little resentment on behalf of the Bulgarians. This

was so because the reform was made to look as a continuation of the ancient Bulgarian-Russian linguistic closeness. It was well established that Russian culture had historic bonds to the Bulgarian national development. The myth about the great Bulgarian communist education relied on this bonding. Additionally the myth asserted that Russia as well the USSR were no doubt great cultures and Bulgaria could only develop through its Russification or Sovietisation. The Sovietisation of Bulgarian culture was also mythologised as an achievement of modernisation and total secularisation. Soviet Marxism-Leninism penetrated all aspects of Bulgarian education. It was the undisputed norm of intellectual endeavour. All ideological and non-ideological subjects, from Marxism-Leninism, Historical Materialism and Dialectical Materialism to Agriculture, Theatre and Sport were studied in the Soviet tradition.

Apart from the connection communism made between things Russian and Soviet, the success of the myth about the great communist education was in the promotion of Bulgarian culture as exclusively Bulgarian language culture. This was despite the full Sovietisation of Bulgarian education and the multicultural model which it advertised in its official documents . The new myth was about Bulgaria being a linguistically homogenous country. During the 1940s and 1950s communism promoted the studies of minority languages and cultures as long as their content was in line with the state ideology. But gradually minority languages were eliminated from the educational system. By the late 1970s communist Bulgaria established a one-language educational system. Cultural diversity was seen as a threat to the communist education, Turkish language education remaining the biggest problem. The myth about multilingual communist education was failed by the communist reforms Education meant education in Bulgarian and about things Bulgarian, which was after all a purely linguistic nationalist ambition.

The myth of the great communist education had one very important function - to hide the failure of Bulgarian communist economics. Communist education was propagandised as a part of the anti-imperialist struggle. It glorified the workers and the peasants who were building the perfect world with simple tools and educated in the spirit of socialism. The myth about the educational advancement was supplemented by the idea that Bulgaria, alongside the Soviet Union and the rest of the Eastern European countries, was advancing industrially and otherwise as opposed to the decline of the capitalist West. But this myth could succeed only in the conditions of communist isolation. During the 1950s Stalinism encouraged Bulgarian isolation from the outside world; the only measure of success was Soviet appreciation.²⁹ But during the 1960s the failure to reform the economy, the increasing information about western wealth, and the fading of the myth about Soviet prosperity, undermined the myth of Bulgaria as an ever-advancing country. The economic failure became more and more obvious and communism sought to compensate with non-material performance. The regime sought to replace the myth of the economic prosperity of Bulgaria with the myth of the great Bulgarian intellectual endeavour. A great deal of resources and intellectual efforts concentrated on humanitarian subjects. From there came the belief that the West may be rich materially but Bulgarian communism's wealth was in its intellectual development.

²⁹ John D. Bell, The Bulgarian Communist Party from Blagoev to Tzivkov, (Stanford, California: Hoover Institute Press, Stanford University, 1986), pp. 108-109.

VI. Communist Symbolism

Communist symbols were supposed to derive from the meanings of production and political power in accord with the theory of the supremacy of class identity.

Communism faced the task of creating a whole new system of custom and ritual symbolising the new values of state and society. Most importantly communism could not rely on the past because it was rejected as wrong as far as it was not orientated towards the communist revolution. Communism claimed that fundamentally it was a self-sufficient reality, which was future-orientated. This was in full contrast with nationalism, which claimed to encompass all aspects of community life and put a special emphasis on the past as the main source of national identity. In terms of symbols, nationalism claimed that they were rooted deep in the past and spoke exclusively through old meanings and traditional beliefs. However in reality communism also needed the past to substantiate its symbolic presentation. Whenever communist symbolism was based exclusively on the idea that communism offered a totally new life to Bulgarian people, it lacked coherence and was short-lived. Communist symbols of this type did not survive the fall of communism and gradually were removed from the symbolic tradition of Bulgaria.

Communism produced its own customs and rituals, which were maintained through party directions alone and were gradually emptied from meaningful content. The BCP policy was to design symbols which matched the ideas of the communist regime. But in fact the symbols of Bulgarian communism which were designed to mythologise communist ideas failed unless supported by the Bulgarian cultural national tradition. The symbols of the Bulgarian communist state survived only as much as they recalled the pre-communist time. The main reason for this was that the symbols deriving from class identity and the Bulgarian-Soviet alliance were imposed and non-consensual symbols.

By the 1980s communist Bulgaria celebrated nationalism as the main content of its symbols. All symbols of the Bulgarian state - the flag, the coat of arms, the anniversaries, the maps and the main documents asserting the legitimacy of the Bulgarian socialist state such as the communist constitutions, the names of places and memorials - were specifically designed to express communist ideology. But in the end none of them succeeded in replacing the symbols of the Bulgarian nation.

VII. Symbols of Class Equality

Communism had to create symbols of class identity and class equality because these were fundamental to communist society. All socialist citizens were supposed to identify with class first. By the 1970s the idea of the 'advanced socialism' was promoted in Bulgaria and class equality was declared to be on the way of being achieved. Again communism had problem with the concept of time. For equality was an essentially utopian idea, which communism promised to build in the future. The full realisation of communism was always promised still to come. And of course class equality was a very vulnerable theme of communism because it was never achieved. On the contrary in the course of time communism created new classes.³⁰ As Kertzer argues, in general the notion that people are or could be fully equal is a mystification and a product of a social construction of reality. He suggests that in fact the more inequality there is in a society, the bigger the opportunity there is for creating a mystification about the lack of it.³¹ This was certainly the case of Bulgarian communism. Most rituals of class equality were an obvious mystification. In theory everyone had both the right and the duty to be part of the communist life. All Bulgarian citizens were supposed to be engaged in the building of communism. The everyday code of communication, which symbolised such participation consisted of customs and rituals which were introduced by Bulgarian communism in Soviet fashion. The greeting 'comrade', which substituted the gender based pre-communist '*gospodin*', '*gospozha*' or '*gospozhitza*', the compulsory participation in communist children and youth organisations, which created new communist identities ('*chavdarcheta*' and '*pioneri*'), the obligatory public appearance at the celebrations of communist holidays

³⁰ See Milovan Djilas, The New Class :An Analysis of the Communist System, (London: Themes & Hudson, 1957).

³¹ See Kertzer, Ritual, Politics and Power, p. 48.

and participation in elections, were all symbols of class equality. The actual involvement in these customised activities was a symbol of support which Bulgarian citizens gave to the communist regime. But because they were based on the concept that the citizens must obey the state in a disciplined manner, their symbolic presentation said much more about the communist regime itself than about how much it was desired. Instead of demonstrating the class equality communism ritualised its inequalities.

The Bulgarian coat of arms, dating back as early as the 14th century, underwent several changes after Bulgarian independence, but the main elements required by the constitution remained the same. The central figure was a crowned lion. The communist regime changed the Bulgarian coat of arms twice. In 1946, when the monarchy was abolished, the communist-dominated government removed the crown. In 1947 a five-pointed star, a cog-wheel, and two ears of corn were included. Most importantly the date of the communist revolution, 9 September 1944, was inscribed on a band.³² This symbol aimed to incorporate the communist state into Bulgarian national history as firmly as possible. But it also claimed to be the 'beginning' of Bulgarian statehood. The coat of arms was one of the first symbols of communism, which was changed after 1989. The debate was highly politicised but the date of the foundation of the Bulgarian state was recovered with little disagreement. The idea that the creation of the Bulgarian state could be symbolised by the arrival of communism in 1944 was unsustainable.

The more powerful symbols of communism were the mass manifestations marking the national communist holidays, such as the celebration of the October revolution and the coming to power of Bulgarian communism: 7 November and 9 September, respectively.

³² Veselin Metodiev and Luchezar Stoinaov (eds.), Bulgarski konstitutsii i konstitutsioni proekti, (Sofia: D-r Petur Beron, 1990), pp. 52-53.

They required everyone's involvement and were supposed to impress the entire world with their grandness. The structure of the manifestations itself had highly symbolic meanings. Although the entire country was celebrating with mass events, the focus of attention was the parades in the capital, Sofia. Usually the communist leadership lined up on the platform of the mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov, in the centre of the city. The selected high-ranking members of the BCP greeted the passing masses gathered to participate in the manifestation. The leaders were strictly ordered according to their position in the party hierarchy. This power structure defined symbolically the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. The manifestations became a ritual of the party rule rather than of 'people's power'. Additionally engaging in symbolic practices members of any organisation mark themselves off from non-members. But because of the compulsory character of the public manifestations of support under communism, there was nobody left to be distinguished from (any non-participants would be in such small numbers that it wouldn't matter). In this way the symbolic dividing line was mainly, if not only, about those who ruled and those who were ruled. Although the symbol aimed to manifest the societal unity, it actually ritualised the divisions within. Moreover communist organisations were strictly closed societies. Their symbolic code, from party membership to holiday places, manners and dress style distinguished them from the rest of the people.

Thus communist belief in class equality did not find appropriate symbolic expressions. But the BCP did not find this completely intolerable. One of the ways of countering the general weakness of the communist symbols was to underline the ethnic Bulgarian character of Bulgarian communism. In relation to the ethnic diversity of Bulgaria, the discrepancy in the communist symbols of equality was very clear: the more official ideology emphasised that all Bulgarian citizens were equal, the more ethnic inequality became apparent. For example Article 45, paragraph 7 of the 1971 Constitution stated

that 'Citizens of non-Bulgarian origin, in addition to the compulsory study of the Bulgarian language, shall have the right to study also in their own language'.³³ But by the 1970s most of the minorities' language education was practically non-existent. Thus the communist 'rule of law' on ethnic issues was not substantiated. Therefore instead of providing the regime with symbolic power, it actually exposed its failure.

Another similarly unintended side effect of the communist myth of citizens' equality was the mystification of the ethnic minorities as the 'privileged minorities'. The myth was about the demographic decline of the Bulgarian nation as opposed to the demographic growth of the ethnic minorities, which was seen as a direct consequence of the communist policy to develop a multicultural Bulgaria. The belief behind the myth came from the BCP policy from the 1960s to encourage the demographic growth of the nation by various child benefits and maternity allowances: the more children there were in the family, the more benefits were received from the state. Additionally although the right to abortion was never banned, married women were entitled to it only after having two children. At the same time, the demographic growth which Bulgarian communism promoted could not escape the association with the extended family structure of the Turkish and Roma people in the country. Consequently most people viewed that these minorities benefited from such policies far more than Bulgarians. This was seen as an unfair arrangement provided by the communist state. A good example in this respect was the special policy towards the Roma introduced during the 1950s. It lasted until 1965 and was perceived largely by the Bulgarian majority as a set of privileges. In fact the communist regime carried out a policy for the sedementarisation and assimilation of the Roma population, which required the creation of a living space and employment for

³³ Williams B. Simons, Communist Constitutions of the World, (Walters Noordhoff: 1984), p. 47.

them. But most Bulgarians felt that this was not necessary and that the policy was wrong because it encouraged the growth of the minority populations in Bulgaria.

Despite the uneven results of this policy one thing was clear - that Bulgarian communism was concerned about the demographic pattern of the development of the ethnic Bulgarian nation. The population growth was not seen as a problem of expanding the overall communist world but rather as a question of the growth of the Bulgarian people under communism.

VIII. Symbolic Meanings of the Bulgarian Constitution

The most important symbols of communist 'organisational identity' were the communist constitutions. In 1947, shortly after communism took over, Bulgaria adopted the new 'Dimitrov constitution'. It defined Bulgaria as a people's democracy created by the revolution of 1944 and promised all citizens equal civil, religious and employment rights. But very importantly it also stated that all these rights were conditional on not being subversive to the communist revolution.³⁴ It included religious freedom and gave the right to the national minorities to study in their own language alongside with Bulgarian.³⁵

This concept was further developed by the 1971 constitution, which changed the definition of citizenship. Now Bulgaria was 'a socialist state of the working people in town and countryside headed by the working class'. Accordingly everyone was supposed to assimilate into the working class. The idea was that the new constitution should symbolise the Bulgarian state of the working class. Article 1, paragraphs 2 and 3, specifically stated that the BCP was the leading force of the society and the state, which was a further move towards centralising political power.³⁶

Thus the meaning of the Bulgarian constitution changed. The new constitution came to symbolise the Bulgarian communist leadership, which saw Bulgaria as a homogenous society and a centralised nation-state, but also allowed no restrictions or privileges based on national, religious or racial differences, as stated in Article 34, paragraph 2, 3 and 4.³⁷

But the communist constitution as a major symbol of political power had to compete

³⁴ See Crampton, A Short History of Modern Bulgaria, p. 165.

³⁵ Veselin Metodiev and Luchezar Stoianov (eds.), *Bulgarski konstitutsii i konstitutsionni proekti*, (Sofia: D-r Petur Beron, 1990), p.51.

³⁶ See Simons, Communist Constitutions, p. 39.

with Bulgaria's pre-communist constitutional tradition. The Turnovo constitution of 1879 was the first constitution of independent Bulgaria and as such was a very powerful national symbol. It marked not only Bulgarian independence after the withdrawal of the Ottomans, but also it was at the core of the myth about the great democracy of the so-called third Bulgarian state.³⁸ Originally the Turnovo constitution declared Eastern Orthodoxy as the official religion of Bulgaria. But it also gave rights to the other spiritual faiths. The adopting of the document served as a political ritual and as such it had enormous significance for the legitimacy of Bulgarian national independence. The Turnovo constitution was modelled on western constitutions and showed the desire of the Bulgarian political elite to become part of the democratic European tradition. The Turnovo constitution was a symbol of the new Bulgaria aspiring to democratic European values. Communist constitutions had a different symbolic meaning as they were designed to legitimise party policy. They declared rights and duties which the party itself persecuted in practice. As documents of political legitimacy communist constitutions failed to become part of the myth of Bulgarian democracy. After 1989 the Turnovo constitution was resurrected as a symbol of the Bulgarian democratic tradition, whereas the communist constitutions were rejected as an imposed interruption of this tradition.

³⁷ See Metodiev and Stoianov, *Bulgarski konstitutsii i konstitutsioni proekti*, 1990.

³⁸ According to Bulgarian historiography there were three Bulgarian states: the first, from 681-803; the second, from 1185-1197; and the third from 1878.

IX. Communist Leaders as Symbols

Communist leaders everywhere in the Soviet bloc served as symbols of the communist regimes. As discussed previously Bulgarian communist leaders were unique in one way - they all had a particularly strong relationship with the Soviets. Their subservience to the Soviet regime distinguished them among the communist leaders of the rest of the communist bloc.³⁹ But Bulgarian communism had its own mythology of the great communist Bulgarian leaders who not only adhered to communist ideals but also had to apply them in practice. The strongest among them were the mythologised personalities of Georgi Dimitrov, the first communist Bulgarian leader, and the last one, Todor Zhivkov. Dimitrov was distinguished from all other communist leaders of Bulgaria by being exposed in a mausoleum in Sofia, which was a Soviet-style memorial symbolising the immortality of communism. The mummified body of the most internationally known Bulgarian communist was supposed to give the impression of communist Bulgaria as a sacred country. But what undermined Dimitrov's mythical credibility was the fact that he was seen as 'the Soviet man' in Bulgaria because of promoting the idea of Macedonian national identity in Bulgaria in accord with Soviet instructions. He remained strictly a symbol of Soviet communism in Bulgaria and after 1989 his name became a symbol of the Soviet influence in Bulgaria rather than one of Bulgarian communism.

The most successful symbol of the Bulgarian communist leadership was the myth about the 'father' of the communist Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov. The success of this myth was in that Zhivkov tackled the main contradiction of the communist leadership as a symbol of the Bulgarian state - namely, whether communist leaders could really be national leaders

³⁹ Georgi Dimtrov, Vasil Kolarov and Vulko Chervenkov were perceived as the most prominent pro-Soviet political leaders of communist Bulgaria.

of Bulgaria .The very clear identity of all Bulgarian communist leaders as Russian and Soviet disciples did not suffice to turn them into successful myths. But the myth about Zhivkov, the longest-serving head of the Bulgarian communist state, was that he was not only a communist leader but also a national leader. From here derived his image as 'the people's leader' in communist Bulgaria.

Zhivkov was a 'charismatic leader' in the Weberian sense of the word. His political instincts were one of a populist. The main reason for his success as a Bulgarian communist leader was that he associated himself with the Bulgarian people, which he understood mainly as the Bulgarian peasants. Consequently Zhivkov advertised his policy openly as an anti-intellectual one and voiced his suspicions of the Bulgarian intelligentsia. In this way he responded to the traditional hostility of the countryside to the city, which characterised much of the Bulgarian society traditionally. Although formally Zhivkov promoted himself as a working class leader of the underground communist movement, he emphasised his image as a hunter and admirer of rural beauty and folk culture. He detested the city life and mentality because it represented the idea of potential change. Zhivkov feared change, and this helped him to bond with the Bulgarian peasantry, which was shattered by the communist revolution and aspired for stability. Notably there was no religious element in his populism, which made him less vulnerable to possible accusations of anti-Marxism-Leninism.

Zhivkov stayed in power much longer than any other Bulgarian communist leader. He acquired much more power than Anton Ugov, by becoming general secretary of the BCP , prime-minister and head of the State Council. In contrast to Georgi Dimitrov he had no international reputation as a communist. And his name was associated with the relaxation of political life in Bulgaria after the Stalinist rule of Vulko Chervenkov.

The most important moment in Zhivkov's biography as a Bulgarian communist was his participation in the partisan movement. His legendary image as a head of the partisan brigade Chavdar, which entered Sofia on 9 September 1944. The myth about Zhivkov being the leader of the Bulgarian partisans aimed to legitimise him as one of the founders of the native Bulgarian communist movement. And this in its own terms was supposed to legitimise his power during communism. The dramatic presentation of his involvement in the historic events of communism taking over Bulgaria made him a symbol of a political 'bastion of morality and tireless servant of the public good', to use Kertzer terminology.⁴⁰ Zhivkov also drew upon being a 'Soviet man', but in a different way from Dimirov. He never challenged the Soviet line and even offered Bulgaria to be part of the USSR but this was hardly seen as a contribution to communist internationalism. He saw the Soviet factor as the most stabilising and protective force for Bulgaria. The Bulgarian satellite position matched perfectly his idea of maintaining power without ever changing anything. This unquestionable respect for Soviet supremacy gave Zhivkov's public perception the 'coronation' rituals such as visits, meetings and praises of the Soviet might. The Soviet support he enjoyed, particularly under the Brezhnev's rule, played the role of a divine, outside power delivering political immortality to the Bulgarian leader.

Zhivkov's political inability was illustrated during the time of Gorbachov's *perestroika* in the 1980s. This time the changes in the Soviet line divested the Bulgarian communist leader's authority and after the rituals of Soviet support stopped being performed, Zhivkov's ability to exercise power decreased substantially. Zhivkov was quite popular among the Bulgarian people because he presented himself as a protector of the nation, not as a reorganiser or reformer of any kind. He came to symbolise national leadership as

⁴⁰ Kertzer, Ritual, Politics and Power, p.108.

much as the communist regime because he aspired to be the Bulgarian 'people's leader', (*chovek ot naroda*). Zhivkov's political image was based on two main features of the Bulgarian national tradition: being a hero from a peasant background and transformed by history into a protector of the ethnic Bulgarian nation. He was entirely orientated towards being a leader of a united Bulgarian people and detested the ethnic diversity of the country. His personal responsibility for the anti-Turkish campaign in the 1980s remains unclear, but his total support for the forcible expulsion of the Bulgarian Turks in 1989 has been widely acknowledged.

X. The Myth of the Origins of Class Conflict

According to communist theory, historical conflicts were all based on class. Therefore Bulgarian communism attempted to reinterpret the medieval past as the time of the big Bulgarian class battles. The idea was to create a myth about very early Bulgarian class consciousness. Again communism desired to be seen as an ideology which originated in the legendary past of the nation. This project was ridden by contradictions and constructed a deeply confused and incoherent mythology. On one hand, communism glorified medieval Bulgaria for its military successes and cultural achievements. It acknowledged that the old Bulgarian khans and the tsars were great men and 'founding fathers' of Bulgaria. They were upheld as symbols of Bulgarian military might, state leadership and cultural progress.⁴¹

On the other hand communism tried to use medieval history in order to generate the idea of Bulgaria being historically involved in class conflict. Communist scholars selected one particular event which seemed to match the idea, the Peasant Uprising. The original story was that during the 13th century Bulgaria suffered severe internal struggles and outside threats, which led to serious mass distress. The population rebelled and was led by a man called Ivailo, who was a swineherd and became Bulgarian tsar for three years.⁴² Communist history chose to mythologise Ivailo as the leader of the first 'anti-feudal peasant revolt' in the world which resulted in the leader taking power.⁴³ Ivailo was supposed to symbolise the capacity of the Bulgarian peasantry to organise for action and

⁴¹ See Mihail Andreev and Dimitur Angelov, Istoria na bulgarskata feodalna durzhava i pravo, (Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1972), p.73.

⁴² See Crampton, A Short History, p. 6.

⁴³ See Alexander Fol, Vasil Guzelev, Nikolai Genchev, Konstantin Kosev, Ilcho Dimitrov, Andrei Pantev, Milcho Lalkov and Kostadin Petrov, Kratka istoria na Bulgaria, (Sofia: Izdatelstvo Nauka i Izkustvo, 1981), p.113.

to actually make political change. Communism depicted the Bulgarian peasants as possessed by ideas of class struggle from early times. Essentially the myth of the very old class-minded Bulgaria ascribed political radicalism to the peasantry. But it resonated neither with the rural nor the urban Bulgarians living under communism.⁴⁴ The myth about the medieval class awareness of the Bulgarian people was alien to the Bulgarian community. As Schöpflin argues, 'A myth that fails to elicit a response is either alien to the community, or inappropriate at the time when it is used, or, conceivably, evokes a response only in small numbers or those addressed'.⁴⁵ Indeed social rebellion was alien to the Bulgarian countryside and the myth was a total failure. One could only speculate about how successful the myth could have been if constructed around the idea that Ivailo was actually a messiah.

⁴⁴ The idea that Ivailo was a Bulgarian people's hero was pursued not only by historians. In 1959 at the request of the party, the opera 'Ivailo' was composed by Marin Goleminov and performed regularly since. It was undoubtedly one of the most absurd endeavors of the Bulgarian classical music under communism.

⁴⁵ Schöpflin, 'The Function of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths', p. 27.

XI. Myths of Territory

Most modernists think that territorial nationalism is a modern phenomenon. The idea that the boundaries of the nation have to be congruent with the territorial borders of the state is considered the essence of nationalism.⁴⁶ Yet the very idea of boundaries - territorial, linguistic, religious or demographic - seems to be a pre-modern concept. As Grosby argues, the constitutive prerequisite of the existence of a territory is the existence of boundaries understood in a broad sense; the extent of the 'jurisdiction of the *lex terrae*', or the articulated law of the land, is the most important boundary of the territory. Perceptions of territory seem not 'negotiated' but most often accepted as 'given'.⁴⁷ Changes of territorial boundaries are always hard for people to accept because the places where the nation lives is mythologised. Schöpflin argues that the idea of the nation is linked to the perceptions of territory through myth. Myth creates the idea that territorial borders mark not simply territory but a sacred territory.⁴⁸

The idea of the Bulgarian nation is based on the myth of the liberation of the Bulgarian territories and the struggle to unite them in one nation-state. The slogan of the Bulgarian independence movement at the end of 19th century was to liberate the Bulgarian lands. At the time when communism came to power after the end of the Second World War Bulgaria had just undergone territorial changes. The most important one was the loss of Macedonia, which Bulgaria occupied during the war. Communism responded to the Bulgarian territorial changes through the myth of the communist liberation. Communism

⁴⁶ See Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 1.

⁴⁷ Steven Grosby, 'Territoriality: the transcendental, primordial feature of modern societies' in 'Nations and Nationalism', 1995, vol. 1 (part 2), pp. 143-148.

⁴⁸ See Schöpflin, 'The Function of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths', p.29.

claimed that it liberated the Bulgarian people and country from the oppression of the class conflict, which was seen as the primary source of all misfortunes of Bulgaria. But the communist claim extended to the territorial changes throughout the entire Bulgarian history. Communism declared that Bulgaria suffered from foreign domination, but also of class conflict: the medieval Bulgarian empires underwent disintegration in the hands of feudal rulers; the Ottoman empire collapsed in a traumatic way because it was based on inequality; the First World War as well as the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) were called 'national catastrophes' - a direct result of the monarchy-bourgeois politics. The party historians postulated that communist historiography offers a different view of the Bulgarian territorial disputes; they were driven by class conflict, not by ideas of nationalism. For instance the 'politically correct' approach to the Macedonian question was to see it first as a matter of class conflict. The Bulgarian bourgeoisie, not the workers and peasants, had claims over Macedonia.⁴⁹

However gradually communism changed its attitude to the Bulgarian national territories. Although the official line continued to be that history was driven by class conflict, communism accepted that the Bulgarian territorial losses were losses of national character first. By the 1980s the official claim established that although the Bulgarian bourgeoisie was to be blamed for the 'national catastrophes', the Macedonian territorial question was a humiliating national loss for the country which the bourgeoisie failed to prevent, not because it acted according to its own class interests, but because it did not have the appropriate foreign policy. The leading communist historian Ilcho Dimitrov stated that the main mistake of the pre-communist Bulgarian governments was that they were too cautious and never really had the courage to stand in defence of the Bulgarian

⁴⁹ Georgi Bakalov, Izbrani istoricheski suchinenia, Zhak Natan & Alexandur Burmov (eds.), (Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1960), p. 359.

national interests.⁵⁰

The communist party accepted that the territorial boundaries established at the end of the Second World War were to be maintained. Communist Bulgaria was not to be altered territorially. It was to be honoured as 'small but beautiful'. Communism offered territorial stability under Soviet protection. The myth of the Bulgarian national territory was limited to the glorification of the country's medieval greatness and the partition of Bulgaria at the Berlin Congress in 1878. Under communism the territorial partition of Bulgaria continued to be understood as a result of Great Power intervention in Balkan politics. In general their ambitions were explained in terms of imperialist and capitalist aggression. But gradually the idea was promoted that the territorial stability under communism was not sufficient to compensate for the territorial losses in the past.

⁵⁰ Ilcho Dimitrov, Bulgaria na Balkanite i v Evropa, (Sofia: Narodna Prosveta, 1980), pp. 16-20.

XII. The Leader's Daughter and '1300 Years Bulgaria'

The 1980s marked the renewal of the myth of the great national Bulgarian culture. The daughter of Zhivkov played a special role in constructing and promoting this myth, which had tremendous impact on the dynamics of Bulgarian communism and nationalism during the 1980s.

Zhivkova prompted a cultural policy which became the first systematic attempt to create a new Bulgarian communist theory of cultural nationalism and apply it in practice. She also aimed to establish a new Bulgarian national cultural communist elite as openly promoting the need for strong national values in the country. Through her activities and writings Zhivkova introduced Bulgarian cultural nationalism as a mainstream political movement under communism. She created new national institutions and changed the architectural landscape of the capital by building the biggest cultural institution in the country, the Palace of People's Culture. The underlying idea was to mythologise Bulgaria as a self-sufficient and unique cultural nation. Bulgaria no longer needed to be part of the Slavic world in order to be part of the universe. This was a major innovation in the Bulgarian communist mythology.

Zhivkova's policy was in the spirit of the Bulgarian Revival movement from the 19th century. Similarly to the call for the re-awakening of the nation, Zhivkova demanded that the Bulgarian people re-discover their mythological past and use it in order to achieve national glory in the future. Upholding Bulgarian national cultural supremacy Zhivkova asserted that culture was a superior and to a great extent a separate phenomenon from the world of politics, ideology or economics. The inspiration of Bulgarian national life was to be found in the national artefacts. Zhivkova declared the supremacy of the

Bulgarian human spirit as the driving force of social advancement, including the socialist one.

As a daughter of the Bulgarian communist leader, Zhivkova enjoyed almost unlimited powers in Bulgarian political life and was solely responsible for the cultural, educational and scientific development in the country from 1979 until her early death in 1981. Her most ambitious project was called '1300 Years Bulgaria' commemorating the longevity of the Bulgarian state. The early 1980s saw the enormous Palace of People's Culture erected in central Sofia and the international programme Children's Peace Assembly as well as the establishment of the memorial Peace Bells in the outskirts of the capital. Alongside the Foundation for Foreign Art in Sofia and the Centre for Medieval Studies Ivan Duichev, they all became symbols of the new Bulgarian communist policy. At the same time, her entire project signalled the deep crisis of the communist regime in Bulgaria. The attempt was to reinvent the communist state as a continuation of the Bulgarian Golden age: 'We are proud of the Bulgarian State in the Balkans, which through the union of Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians laid the foundations of continuity of the social and cultural development, in the course of which the Bulgarian nationality and later the Bulgarian nation were formed. ...The socialist state is the highest rung of the ladder in the ages-long development of the state organisation of the Bulgarian people until the present days; it is the legitimate heir of the continuous development of all things progressive and democratic in the thirteenth centuries' history of Bulgaria.⁵¹ Zhivkova's approach to restore and re-invent the Bulgarian tradition by using messianic and superstitious folk beliefs as evidence of unparalleled capacity was supposed to create a specifically Bulgarian cultural model of national development. It resembled the New Age movement,

⁵¹ Liydmilla Zhivkova, Her Many Worlds: New Culture & Beauty Concepts & Action, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), pp. 50-51.

which developed in the West in the late 1960s as a mixture of Eastern mysticism and western liberalism. In fact Zhivkova had the unique privilege to travel everywhere in the world and she had a particular taste for Indian arts. Spending some time in Britain while studying in Oxford may have acquainted her more intimately with fashionable subcultures, which she probably used as a model for some of her programmes.

Zhivkova's politics were limited to the cultural sphere and in her role as a minister of culture she did little else. Her understanding of communism was diffused within ideas of culture. She formulated it as socialism which involves the 'need for renovating changes imperatively imposed by the epoch we are living in...the rich historical, cultural and spiritual experience that has been accumulated by the Bulgarian nation over the ages, revealing the militant vitality and impetuosity of the socially renovated society and people'.⁵²

Zhivkova was fascinated by remote and exotic cultures such as India but never looked for inspiration in the different ethnic cultures within her own country. She offered Bulgaria a cultural model which was exclusively ethnically Bulgarian. Although writers, artists, politicians, mostly members of the younger generation of intelligentsia and communist party elite, admired Zhivkova's ideas, her time also signalled the decline of Bulgarian communism seeking to re-invent itself as a cultural nationalist movement inspired by myths of the past. The official promotion of Bulgaria as a unique national culture showed how profound was the crisis of legitimacy in Bulgarian communism. Mythologising Bulgaria as a unique and universal culture was supposed to provide the missing link between the 'new' communist mythology and the 'old' national myths.

⁵² Liydmilla Zhivkova, Perfecting Man and Society, (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1980), p. 362.

XIII. Conclusion

Bulgarian communist mythology was incoherent and most of its symbols were weak. Communism's initial claim about being the new history of Bulgaria was gradually transformed into the claim that it was also deeply rooted into the antique Bulgarian cultural tradition. Communist myths were supposed to assert the historical importance of Bulgarian class identity and undermine the bourgeoisie 'nationalistic' mythology. At the same time communism could not escape the national tradition and made constant references to it in order to support its own myths. The main difficulty it had in constructing its cosmos was the problem of time. Communism was the system of the present, which claimed to be disconnected from the past if it was not associated with the historical struggles of the working class. In its aims communism was totally orientated to the future. But it had to create symbols out of the Bulgarian pre-communist past. And it was precisely because it was an ideology of the future that it needed the past more than any other concept. Because the future was so uncertain and utopian in its nature, communism had to find support in the past. In theory it denied a great deal of it, but in practice it tried to use it for its own purposes.

The communist mythology rested on the question of how 'old' was communism in Bulgaria. Similarly to nationalism, communist ideology sought to legitimate itself as an 'antique' social order. But in difference to nationalism, communism had to select only those events and heroes of the Bulgarian history which could be interpreted from a revolutionary point of view. This was a serious restriction, which made communist mythology an exclusive rather than inclusive system. Bulgarian communism was weakest when it tried to incorporate the class conflict in the national mythology, as in the case of Ivailo, who it held as a hero of the Bulgarian peasants' radicalism. The communist myth

was successful when it made the communist perspective of modernity compatible with the Bulgarian national mythology aiming to underline the uniqueness of Bulgarian people, as was the case with the myth of the civilising mission of the Bulgarian people. After 1989, the process of rejecting communist celebrations was matched by one of recovering pre-communist national symbols. The communist celebrations of 9 September, the day commemorating the communists' coming to power in 1944, as well as 7 November, the day of the October revolution of 1917 in Russia and 9 May, the day of the Soviet victory in the Second World War in 1945, were abandoned. Instead the day commemorating the signing of the preliminary treaty of San Stefano of 3 March 1878, which established the borders of Greater Bulgaria, was declared the biggest national holiday in 1990.

Bulgarian communism promoted the idea that the country was united under the banner of working class and peasantry alliance. It sought ways of unifying the town and the countryside. The same party structure was established in each town and village and all were connected to the centre through the administrative network. Indeed the effort resembled the use of rituals to connect periphery communities to the centre of state power when new nations are established. The political integration of the countryside was secured through popular participation in 'rites of allegiance', to use Kertzer terms, which featured regularly in community life.⁵³

The countryside celebrated the 'socialist revolution' and party leaders visited farming festivities and communism achieved the homogenisation of this style of life to a great extent. But it was all about the structure of political power, not about beliefs. The division between the Bulgarian city and countryside remained on the level of tradition

versus modernity. The communist idea about the modern Bulgarian being a working class citizen could not be substantiated enough to become a convincing myth and could not compete successfully with the myth of the Bulgarian national identity as unchanged by politics.

Bulgarian communist myths were designed to link radical revolutionary views with national history in order to prove that the Bulgarian mind was communist by nature. This was the idea behind the search for the pre-modern Bulgarian roots of communism. Communism claimed that the nation had been engaged in movements for social justice since medieval times. The interpretation of the feudal peasant uprising led by Ivailo was the most obvious example in this respect. But there were also other communist myths which were supposed to symbolise communist antiquity. For instance the medieval heresy of Bogomilism was declared an early sign of communist thinking in Bulgaria.⁵⁴ In this way communism, rather than trying to escape the past, chose to use it actively. Communist mythology tried to reconcile its own myths with the myths of Bulgarian nationhood. Bulgarian communism created a mythology by selecting and reinterpreting traditional national myths. It sought support in the national mythology for the construction of its cosmos. It tried to balance previously existing myths of nationhood with newly introduced myths of class-based Bulgarian national identity. As a result, Bulgarian communism succeeded in linking to the national mythology about the

⁵³ See Kertzer, Ritual, Politics and Power, pp. 22 -23.

⁵⁴ Bogomilism was a religious heresy thought to have originated in the lands of Macedonia and Thrace in the 10th century. Bogomils believed in dualism and criticised the Christian church for being corrupt. During communism Bogomilism was taught to have been a Bulgarian anti-religious movement, which preached equality. For a scholarly account of the origins and spread of the Bogomil heresy see Yuri Stoyanov, The Hidden Tradition in Europe, (London : Arkana, Penguin, 1994).

exclusivity of the Bulgarian ethnics, but failed to achieve coherence in its symbols and rituals. The main reason for this was that communism designed and imposed new myths, but they proved to be short-lived and were overshadowed by the old ones. Gradually what was defined as communist tradition in Bulgarian history was emptied of content and substituted with rituals and symbols of cultural nationalism.

Soon after the changes in 1989 Cyril and Methodius were officially granted the status of saints and the celebration of the 'Day of the Bulgarian Enlightenment' (*Den na Bulgarskata Prosveta*) recovered its religious dimension. In this way the myth of the civilising mission regained its full content and came to symbolise two of the main features of Bulgarian ethnicity, language and religion.

Chapter 4: The Macedonian Question in Communist Bulgaria

I. Introduction

Several years ago while in Bulgaria I read in the press that Sofia University may be opening a Macedonian language and literature course. When I called the administrative office to enquire about such a course, there was a pause at the other end of the line followed a sharp response: 'What nationality are you, madam?'. The voice had a familiar tone of irony, reproach and anger. I said automatically, I am Bulgarian.' Then why don't you get yourself a Bulgarian history text book and educate yourself! Shame on you!' The outraged woman put the phone down.

Not long after that I was speaking with a young Bulgarian historian who was writing a new textbook. I was telling him about my recent trip to the Turkish regions of the country and asked whether he would include the history of the Bulgarian Muslims in his book. 'We can't afford to write histories of Turks, Macedonians, Pomaks, etc. because there will be nothing left from Bulgarian history itself. We have to have a national history, like everyone in the West.' Behind us on a shabby wall there was a fresh inscription 'VMRO', the initials of the resurrected Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation in the new Bulgaria. He pointed at it and said: 'They are weak as they have always been... Isn't it sad?'

When the bus from Sofia to Skopje stopped at a town in Pirin Macedonia before the border, a local young man approached me: 'Excuse me, are you Macedonian?' Before I managed to digest the question, a passing woman gave an answer smilingly: 'We are all Macedonians'.

The first story is one of the many, which show the emotional texture of the word 'Macedonian' and the demand for 'correct' historical awareness of the national question in Bulgaria on a daily basis. The second one illustrates the prevailing fear of losing Bulgarian national identity and the insecurity of not having enough of it because of 'other' identities in the same country. The last one reveals in simple words the essence of the Macedonian question in Bulgaria. It is about overlapping identities: some say all Macedonians are Bulgarians; others that all Bulgarians are Macedonians.

The most impressive feature of Macedonian question in Bulgaria remains the emotional intensity of its past - it has by now a history of more than one hundred years - and its capacity to inspire the present. The issue has been central for understanding the Bulgarian nationalism in general and under communism in particular. Fundamentally it constitutes a two-sided debate. It disputes the existence of a distinct Macedonian ethnic identity based on history, culture and language and questions the legitimacy of the Macedonian nationhood. It has been discussed mainly as a historical question involving the geopolitics of the Balkans after the collapse of the Ottoman empire. Later it is seen as a result of the communist idea to create a separate Macedonian state, nation, language and history. It is also generally assumed that the Bulgarian communist policy on the Macedonian question was internationalist and lacked the nationalist passion of the pre-war government.

This chapter focuses on the effects of the Macedonian question on the formation, development and changes in the communist concept of Bulgarian national identity. The Bulgarian communist party policy on the Macedonian problem after the Second World War kept changing until the great changes of 1989. Although the BCP claimed that it stood for internationalism in relation to the Macedonian question, after 1948 the Bulgarian communists' project was to homogenise the country and to deny the existence

of Macedonian identity in Bulgaria. The party also sought to compose a consolidated national history of Bulgaria, which required certain twists in the policy of communism. Most importantly the Bulgarian communist leadership, was exceptionally loyal to Moscow and tried to balance Soviet demands for internationalist policy and Bulgarian nationalism. Yet at the end the BCP reintroduced the traditional view about the Macedonian question according to which Macedonian and Bulgarian people were ethnically the same. Initially the BCP's ideas about developing Macedonia as an independent state in order to be included in a communist federation represented a break from the mainstream Bulgarian politics, which envisioned Bulgarian and Macedonian state and national unity as the final aim of the Macedonian movement in Bulgaria. Although throughout its rule the BCP accepted that there may be a political Macedonian nation in Yugoslavia, the party viewed that in their own socialist country Bulgarians and Macedonians had to be united in ethnic terms.

II. Historical Background: The Religious Factor

Historically the Macedonian question in Bulgaria was a struggle for the territorial unity of the geographical lands of Macedonia with the Bulgarian state. Conceptually it was born out of the Ottoman decline that led to the national liberation movements in the Balkans. The struggle to liberate Macedonia from Ottoman rule was perceived as a part of Bulgarian national unification. On one side it was a direct expression of the rise of the Balkan nationalism and on the other it was a reflection of the Great Powers interests in the region.

The Bulgarian struggle for Macedonia began with the establishment of an independent Bulgarian church in 1870 known as the Exarchate. Its ambition before and after the national liberation in 1878 was to dominate the region of Macedonia. The Exarchate demanded the legitimate creation of one state for the Christians of Bulgaria and Macedonia. The Exarchate sought to gain the loyalty of the Slavic-speaking population of Macedonia and persuade them to accept one distinct identity through religious communion with the Bulgarians. Further, it aimed to stimulate the development of national consciousness towards achieving political power. It stood for the integration of Macedonia into the Bulgarian independent state and claimed that the national, state and religious boundaries should be congruent. Thus the Bulgarian movement for unification with Macedonia started as a church organisation and envisioned the unity of the Bulgarian and Macedonian communities in one nation-state. This ideal was never to be achieved.

The Bulgarian Exarchate was established in 1870 by *firman* (decree) issued by the Sultan. It was an autonomous Orthodox Church under the Greek patriarch's jurisdiction. Thus

the national church was created eight years before the state. It was largely seen as the first national institution using the Bulgarian language. This was not an unusual development in the process of nation-formation, for religious unity is very often perceived as the basis of creating states. However, in the case of the Bulgarian Exarchate the main question was not the establishment of religious status or unity of the Christians, since they already enjoyed this under the Ottoman law. Balkan Christianity had the status of a *millet* under the control of the Greek patriarchate in Istanbul.¹The *millet* was essentially a recognition of religious identity. But the movement for an independent Bulgarian church demanded its independent institution. It was also fused with national ideas so that the struggle for a national church served as the commencement of national awareness. The movement for Bulgarian national independence was based on the movement for religious Christian unity.

The importance of religion in the nation formation of the Balkan states has been viewed as one of the specific features of Balkan nationalism. King argues that religious identification is the key element of the Balkan national consciousness. He illustrates the close connection between nationality and religion on the Balkans with the case of Bulgaria: 'The establishment in 1870 of the Bulgarian Exarchate, whose territory included all of Macedonia, Dobruja, and western Thrace, as well as present-day Bulgaria, advanced the Bulgarian claim, particularly in light of the close connection between nationality and religion in the Balkans'.²The political dimension of the 'church-liberating struggles of the Bulgarians', as they are known in the Bulgarian historiography, crystallised in its content

¹ The *millet* was an administrative entity which defined the status of any religious community living under Ottoman rule: Christians, Armenians, Jews etc.

when the Exarchate started educational activities and church-building in the Macedonian lands. Whether the population of Macedonia was to be enticed by the Bulgarian Exarchate was actually a political question about its ethnic and national identity. The new generations were to study in Bulgarian schools and pray in Bulgarian churches, and as a way to consolidate a Bulgarian national identity. The biggest achievement of the Exarchate was to boost Bulgarian-language education. In general language and religion were seen as the most effective uniting factors in the creation of the nation: 'Through religion and education the Christians of Macedonia were to acquire a national identity - Bulgarian, Greek or Serbian - depending upon one's religious affiliation and the school a child attended'.³

The Macedonian question was further complicated because of the contesting claims of Bulgaria's neighbours. The Bulgarian Exarchate competed with the Greek Patriarchate and the Serbian church over Macedonia. The Bulgarian activities were quite effective and there was a significant redirection of pupils to the Bulgarian Exarchate, particularly from the Greeks, who had the most powerful church in the Balkans. The success of the Bulgarian idea in Macedonia was due to combination of factors: principally, Greeks treated the Slavic parishioners namely as inferior, and the weakening of Ottoman rule, which made significant concessions to the Bulgarian church struggle by granting it independence. These factors enhanced the Bulgarian national liberation movement and attracted many Slav people in Macedonia, pulling them away from the Greek influence. Bulgarians ultimately succeeded in the competition with the Greek and the Serbian

² Robert R. King, Minorities under Communism: Nationalities as a Source of Tension among Balkan Communist States, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 187.

churches in Macedonia. At the turn of the century, out of total 1,854 churches in the 15 dioceses of Macedonia, 1,232 were Bulgarian. The Macedonian regions of Veles and Nis as well as the Serbian region of Pirot were included in the Bulgarian Exarchate while the districts of Skopje, Monastir, Stip, and Ohrid were not.⁴

In general Bulgarian Exarchate supported non-violent changes towards the gradual integration of Bulgaria and Macedonia in one nation. Bulgarian priests advocated co-existence with the Ottomans and by building up good relations with the rulers gained permission to increase the number of churches and schools in Macedonia. Yet at the same time the Bulgarian church movement had strong political ambitions, which were much more difficult to achieve. The aim of gaining political power was central to the Bulgarian Exarchate. Political power was seen as the next stage of the Bulgarian national development, after the achievement of the religious unity of all Bulgarian Christians.

Thus the movement for an independent and united Bulgarian church extended to a movement for national Bulgarian recognition. In this way the religious aspect blended fully with the nationalist Bulgarian movement. All pretenders for Macedonian nationhood went through the same development. Each of the competing churches aspired not only to achieve the spiritual unity of its people but also to become a leader of the respective community on the path towards national unity. Macedonia was caught in the middle of these competing claims. The Macedonian question - namely with whom should Macedonians unite - was on the rise.

³ Duncan M. Perry, The Politics of Terror: The Macedonian Liberation Movements 1893-1903, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), p. 28.

⁴ See Perry, The Politics of Terror, 1988.

III. Bulgarian Independence and the Macedonian Question

The Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878 changed the entire political context of the Macedonian question. The whole political map of the Balkans was redrawn. Bulgaria took part in the war with its partisan forces, the so-called '*Bulgarsko opulchenie*', which fought on the side of the Russian army. Turkey was defeated by Russia, which was supported also by Serbia, Romania and Montenegro. The preliminary peace treaty was negotiated and concluded on 3 March 1878. It became known as the San Stefano treaty.⁵ As a result of the war Bulgaria extended from the Danube to the Aegean and from the Vardar and Morava valleys to the Black Sea. Bulgaria included the whole of Macedonia without Thessaloniki and without Halkidiki peninsula. The Great Powers were seriously alarmed by this arrangement. Bulgaria was seen as a future big state, and a potential tool of Russian influence in the Balkans.

The Great Powers decided then to revise the San Stefano treaty, and on 13 June 1878 called the Berlin Congress. The Berlin Congress concluded with the signing of a new treaty on 13 July 1878. Accordingly the Bulgarian territory was split into three parts. Bulgaria proper was defined in the area between the Danube and the Balkan mountains. The area south of these mountains was to be an autonomous Ottoman province called Eastern Rumelia. Macedonia was returned to the Sultan, though rather vague promises were made that it would be granted an independent administration in the future.⁶

⁵ See Traite Preliminaire De St. Stefano, Du 3 Mars/19 Fevrier 1878.

⁶ See Richard J. Crampton, Bulgaria 1878-1918: A History, (East European Monographs, No. CXXXVIII), (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 23-24.

The revision of the preliminary peace settlement, which drew new boundaries in the entire region was strongly felt as very unfair by the new Balkan states. The decisions of the Great powers were interpreted as politically expedient for their own interests, rather than reflecting the ambitions of the emerging nation-states. The ambitions of Bulgarian nationalism were badly damaged. Hence the initial 'inclusion' of Macedonia into the Bulgarian state was accepted as 'right and just', whereas the following 'exclusion' acquired the meaning of 'wrong and unjust'. This notion of injustice towards Macedonia caused by outside politics became a permanent feature of the Bulgarian national mind. The revision of the San Stefano treaty marked the early stages of the Bulgarian national legitimacy. The loss of Macedonia became symbol of Bulgarian nationalism impaired. The Macedonian question became a national Bulgarian myth, born out of the territorial division of the country. The myth about the unjust treatment of Bulgaria held that Bulgaria fall victim of foreign powers and the homeland of the Bulgarian people was dismembered.⁷

⁷ See Hristo Hristov, Stoiko Gruncharov and Elena Statelova (eds.), Istoria na Bulgaria: Vuzstanoviavane i urvurzhdavane na bulgarskata durzhava. Natsionalno-osvoboditelni borbi (1878-1903), (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata Akademia na Naukite, 1991), chapter 2, pp. 38-59. For the most recent view on the emotional perception of the decisions of the Berlin Congress see Andrei Pantev, Godini na demratsia: Edna bulgarska istoria, (Sofia; 'Edem 21', 1992).

IV. The Macedonian Revolutionary Organisations

After the Berlin Congress of 1878 Bulgarian nationalism aspired to reverse historical events and restore justice for Bulgaria. This meant above all the Bulgarian unification with Macedonia. Macedonian organisations, created after the Berlin Congress of 1878 became an inseparable part of the Bulgarian revolutionary tradition. Their leaders created a new image of Bulgarian freedom fighters: national liberation revolutionaries, the vanguard for ideas of Bulgarian nationalism. Although Macedonia was not re-united with Bulgaria, the Macedonian revolutionaries were romanticised as heroes in the struggle for Bulgarian national unity. The fight for Macedonia was mythologised as a glorious period of Bulgarian national development. In Anderson's terms, the Macedonian revolutionary organisations became part of the Bulgarian national 'imagination', which facilitated the nation-state building process. The new Bulgarian state and the Exarchate held that the solution to the Macedonian question was to be sought in the gradual merger of people and territories, and generally preached submission to the Ottomans in the meantime. But in fact Bulgarian schools in Macedonia became 'hotbeds' of national agendas. As Perry observes: 'Bulgarian Exarchate schools were the training grounds for troublemakers'.⁸

The Ottomans preferred to ignore the fact that there was a new generation growing up in Macedonia, which had revolutionary ideas and was also quite unhappy with their life under the Ottoman administration. This generation acquired new intellectual skills and was eager to practice them. Moreover the Ottoman administration had very little control over the educational programme in the Christian schools in Macedonia. The long-lasting religious, social and language barriers between Muslims and Christians under the *millet* system helped the young intelligentsia to flourish as a separate social group with its own

national consciousness. This new generation shifted the view about the non-violent advancement of Macedonian liberation as preached by the church, to more radical agenda for change. The new idea was to organise revolutionary activities. This re-orientation was one of the most significant results of the decline of Ottoman empire. While the Bulgarian church was calling for reforms with respect to the order in the empire, the Christian subjects wanted immediate changes.

The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO or VMRO⁹) was founded in 1893 in Thessaloniki. The Supreme Macedonian Committee of VMRO was established in Bulgaria 1895. Its members were also known as the Supremacists. The purpose of the organisation was to lead the Macedonian liberation movement. But from the outset VMRO was divided into two factions: those who were in favour of the establishment of a separate Macedonia and those who aspired for Macedonian unification with Bulgaria.

VMRO was a secret organisation. VMRO's structure was neither open nor democratic. The organisation recruited supporters from the Bulgarian-language gymnasiums and high schools and almost all of them were supporters of the Bulgarian Exarchate. VMRO was not a popular organisation. By 1894 it had 50 members only. Rather it was an organisation, which in many ways extracted its support from the population. The VMRO activist (*'komita'*) was an outlaw who lived off the land and depended upon the peasantry for information, food and other material aid. But the Bulgarian peasantry did not get involved in militant actions, unless directly provoked, and in general did not share the

⁸ Perry, Politics of Terror, p. 30.

⁹ VMRO is the acronym in Bulgarian (Vutreshna Makedonska Revolutsiona Organizatsia).

revolutionary ideas of the more educated revolutionaries. This does not mean that VMRO did not get any support from the countryside, but rather that it came from composed bands of uprooted people living in poor conditions. Town people, students and teachers also helped the organisation. VMRO's main source of funding was through donors, kidnappings or extortion.¹⁰ Perry defines VMRO as a 'prototypical liberation - terrorist movement found also in other agrarian pre-industrialised societies where a small collection of educated people seek reform in the face of a stronger and more powerful state apparatus.¹¹ VMRO's slogan was 'Freedom or Death' and the foundation principles were. VMRO operated through secret committees and had an idealistic vision about rebellion as a largely emotional and spontaneous revolutionary action.

Although VMRO and the Supremacists were rival organisations, the lines distinguishing them were often blurred, especially at grass root support and membership. Until around 1900 they shared the same goal: the establishment of an independent Macedonia. Later, the Supremacists shifted entirely towards union with Bulgaria, whereas VMRO consisted of different factions and changed policy several times from independent Macedonia to integration with Bulgaria. Many Bulgarian historians interpret the hesitations in VMRO's agenda as a proof of the power of the integrationist element within the organisation and prefer to ignore the fact that VMRO was seriously considering the idea of independent Macedonia. On the contrary Macedonian scholars give prominence to VMRO as supporters of Macedonian independence only and deny any inclinations towards union with Bulgaria.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 76-79.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 212.

¹² For detailed account of the differences between VMRO and the Supremacists see Crampton, Bulgaria 1878-1918, pp. 236-237. For the prevailing Macedonian opinion on

The main contradiction between VMRO and the Supremacists was the question of how to organise the revolution. Unlike VMRO the Supremacists believed in organised military action led by experienced Bulgarian army officers. VMRO was a clandestine organisation whereas the Supremacists were a recognised organisation supported by the Bulgarian government. The latter had more members. The fact that they aspired to be led by professional military men gave the Supremacists a particular power. Despite these differences, there were two main similarities between the two Macedonian revolutionary organisations. First of all both used guerrilla tactics as well as terrorism. The Supremacists' violent tactics went as far as to involve Bulgarian governmental representatives. The disagreements between the two factions led to assassinations on the streets of Sofia and violent extraction of support in the villages of border regions between Bulgaria and Macedonia.¹³

Second, VMRO in its all incarnations and the Supremacists aimed to gain the support of the Christian Slav populations of Macedonia and Bulgaria. Vlachs were the only other ethnic community involved in VMRO activities and they were the only non-Slav members involved in Macedonian affairs.¹⁴ The Supremacists focused on the liberated

the same topic see Ksente Bogoev, Manol Pandevski, Ivan Kantardjiev and Krste Bitovski (eds.), Sto godini od osnovavaneto na VMRO i 90 godini of Ilindenskoto vostanie: prilozhi od nauchen sobir odrzhan na 21-23 Oktomvri, 1993, (Skopje: Makedonska Akademia na Naukite, 1994).

¹³ For analysis of the assassination of the Bulgarian prime-minister Stefan Stambolov and the Macedonian question see Crampton, 'The Decline and Fall of Stambolov, 1891-94'. Bulgaria 1878-1918, pp. 143-158 and Duncan M. Perry, Stefan Stambolov and the Emergence of Modern Bulgaria, 1870-1895, (USA: Duke University Press, 1993).

¹⁴ See Hugh Poulton, Who Are the Macedonians?, (London: Hurst & Company, 1995), pp. 52-57.

Bulgarian lands and their membership was entirely Slav Christian. Albanians, Turks, Jews, Gypsies or other Muslims did not participate in Macedonian revolutionary organisations. This marked the Macedonian question as being an exclusively ethnic Bulgarian issue. The highest point of VMRO's revolutionary activities was the Ilinden uprising of 1903, which became a central myth of the new Macedonian history, the premise of which is that it was about independent Macedonia. At the same time according to modern Bulgarian history, the Ilinden uprising and its leaders are the culmination of the revolutionary struggle for Macedonian and Bulgarian unity. The dispute over the events as well as the heroes of the Ilinden uprising continue to the present day.¹⁵

Modern Bulgarian historians underline the failure of the VMRO as a result of the weak policy of the Bulgarian Exarchate in Macedonia and the 'fragility of Bulgarian nationalism', which acted defensively.¹⁶ The main argument is that Macedonian revolutionary organisations were essentially a Bulgarian national phenomenon.¹⁷

Macedonian historians underline the differences between the two organisations and claim that VMRO was exclusively a Macedonian national organisation, whereas the Supremacists represented the Bulgarian ambitions in Macedonia and used terrorist tactics

¹⁵ For the official Macedonian opinion about who do the leaders of the Ilinden uprising belong to see Ljuben Lape, Mihalo Apostolski, Dimitur Mitrev and Petur Stojanov (eds.), Kniga za Ilinden. Zbornik na trudovi - po povod 65-godishninata od Ilindenskoto Vostanie, (Skopje: Institut za Nacionalna Istoria, 1969).

¹⁶ Zina Markova, Bulgarskata Exarchia 1870-1879, (Sofia: Bulgarska Akademia na Naukite, 1989).

¹⁷ See Diameter Gotsev, Mladezhkite Natsionalno-Osvoboditelni organizatsii na makedonskite bulgari 1919 - 1941, (Sofia: BAN, 1988).

all of the time to achieve their aims.¹⁸ Attempts to portray this period as a shared experience of two overlapping national agendas have been rejected. The activities of the Macedonian revolutionary organisations did not satisfy Bulgarian national aspirations. But at the same time they created a number of markers of national identity both for the Bulgarians and the Macedonians. The history of Macedonian organisations became a major feature of both Bulgarian and Macedonian nationhood. The most prominent leaders of the Macedonian uprisings, Gotse Delchev and Jane Sandanski are declared national heroes in Bulgaria as well as in Macedonia. Both sides claim their mythologised personalities as symbols of their own nation-building movements. Yet in reality they are shared designators of nationhood and a common historical heritage for both countries. But as shown by Bulgaria and Macedonia, sharing history and nationhood has not been appreciated by Balkan nationalism.

At the same time the poor results of VMRO and the Supremacists scaled the Bulgarian national consciousness not only with notions of national revolutionary tradition but also with a sense of insecurity and dissatisfaction. Bulgarian nationalism was deeply disappointed by the failure of the Macedonian revolutionary organisations to achieve the unification of Bulgaria and Macedonia. Thus the notion was created that nation building in modern Bulgaria was interrupted, darkened and remained unfinished.

¹⁸ See Ivan Kantardjiev, 'VMRO i Makedonskoto osloboditelno dvizhenie od krajot na prvata svetska voina do raspatanjeto na monizmot (1919-1990)' in Sto godini od osnovavaneto na VMRO i 90 godini of Ilindenskoto vostanie, pp. 44-73.

V. Independent Bulgaria and Macedonian Organisations

The Macedonian question was a priority for independent Bulgaria. In the 1890s between 100,000 and 200,000 Macedonians emigrated to Bulgaria. Many of these newcomers were educated in the revolutionary spirit of the Macedonian liberation movement. In the Bulgarian capital, Sofia, Macedonian émigrés made up about 18,000-20,000 (26-29%) of the total population of 70,000. They had a substantial presence in the army (33%) and of the Bulgarian government officials (43%).¹⁹ The émigrés kept the Macedonian question high on the political agenda. The Macedonian involvement in Bulgarian politics also divided the political establishment of the country between those who supported the 'return' of Macedonia within Bulgaria and those who did not.

At the same time, the idea of a separate and independent Macedonia was gaining ground. This possibility was considered most dangerous for the Bulgarian-minded Macedonians, who thought that once Bulgarian, Macedonians should remain Bulgarian forever. Yet after the collapse of the Ottoman power, it was obvious that while there was a strong desire among people living in Macedonia to join in one state with Bulgaria, Macedonian nationalism was also on the rise. Macedonian revolutionary organisations expressed the aspirations and divisions of Bulgarian nationalism in relation to Macedonia. No other movement in the history of independent Bulgaria was as important for Bulgarian nationhood as the struggles for Macedonia. Even now, the Macedonian revolutionary organisations continue to symbolise devotion to Bulgarian national unity. The conspiratorial character of the Macedonian revolutionary organisations favoured the idea that political change was about secret contracts, terrorist attacks, and forcible extraction

¹⁹ See Perry, Politics of Terror, p. 35. See also Crampton, Bulgaria 1878-1918, pp. 150-151.

of support. The Macedonian liberation movement saw outside forces and 'other' people as enemies of the national battle. It was exclusively a Christian movement and underlined the importance of religion for Bulgarian nationalism.

VI. The Macedonian Question and the Balkan Wars (1911-13)

Bulgaria fought in the Balkan Wars to gain the Macedonian lands and people. Bulgaria's attachment to Macedonia was highly emotional and drove the Bulgarian policy during the period. For the Balkan Wars were not only over territorial disputes but also disputed national identities. Macedonia was an inseparable part of Bulgarian nationhood. For most Bulgarians to fight for Macedonia meant to fight for Bulgaria itself. Yet despite the Bulgarian victory over Turkey in the First Balkan War, the Bulgarian involvement in the wars became known as the country's 'national catastrophe'.²⁰ Bulgaria suffered heavy losses in the Second Balkan War and the way the wars were conducted raised many controversial points about Bulgarian politics. But the perception that Bulgaria had to fight for Macedonia was never questioned.

Communist Bulgarian history tried to separate the two issues: the Bulgarian involvement in the Balkan wars in general and Bulgarian conduct over the Macedonian question during the wars. Communist historians claimed that although Macedonia was a big loss to Bulgaria, the Bulgarian involvement in the Balkan wars was conducted wrongly by 'Greater Bulgarian chauvinism' (*'velikobulgarski shovinizum'*), as the Bulgarian nationalist aspirations to Macedonia were labelled. This formula aimed to reconcile Bulgarian communism with nationalism in relation to the Bulgarian involvement in the Balkan wars: to reject completely the Bulgarian right to fight for Macedonia was to go too far, but to assert that it was all done in the name of Bulgarian national unity was not

²⁰ Bulgaria won in the First Balkan War which saw the Ottomans lose all mainland European Turkey, except Istanbul. By the end of May 1913 the Balkan allies and Turkey signed the Treaty of London, according to which Bulgaria acquired the whole of the southern part of Dobrudja, but only one-ninth of Macedonia.

acceptable either according to communist doctrine. To blame the Bulgarian bourgeoisie alone for the Bulgarian defeat seemed like an acceptable compromise. Yet the idea that any struggle for Macedonia could be viewed as excessive never gained popularity among the Bulgarian public. The prevailing feeling was that nobody did enough for the Macedonian question in Bulgaria.

In March 1912 Serbia and Bulgaria, which were allies in the First Balkan War, signed a treaty of 'friendship and union'. Actually the treaty was about partitioning Macedonian territory between the two countries. There were to be two zones: the so called 'undisputed' and 'disputed' areas. The 'undisputed' territory of Macedonia was to be assigned to Bulgaria.²¹

Greece disagreed with this arrangement, and Serbia was not satisfied either. Both countries started secret negotiations with Romania, Montenegro and even the Ottoman empire, about how to partition Macedonia in a new way. The division of Macedonia, combined with the internal political disagreements within the Bulgarian government, as well as the personal views of the Bulgarian monarch, Ferdinand, led to the decision to fight again. Bulgaria started the Second Balkan War in 1913, only a month after the end of the first one. This time Bulgaria was defeated and in August 1913 the treaty of Bucharest was signed. As a result Macedonia was partitioned again, this time between Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria. But Bulgaria was hoping for much more than it received, retaining only a small part of Macedonia.

²¹ It included the lands south of the line stretching from Kriva Palanka to Ohrid. The latter included the lands north of the same line including the towns of Skopje, Struga and Tetovo. These were planned to remain subject to arbitration by the Russian tsar.

Yet Bulgarians insisted that the decision to fight another war was correct in view of the 'unjust' partition of Macedonia and the rivalry over the Macedonian territories, which riddled relations with Serbia and Greece. Bulgarian diplomacy was blamed for the failure. Yet the reason behind the Bulgarian 'national catastrophe' during the Balkan Wars - namely the desire to re-gain Macedonia - overrode other considerations and remained unchallenged.

After the Balkan Wars the entire region was hugely damaged and unsettled. Refugees and displaced people were dispersed everywhere. The report of the Carnegie Commission, published first in 1914, registered the consequences of the wars and the policies each of the governments involved carried out on the population.²² The rival claims to Macedonia were summed up by the Commission, which concluded that the Macedonian question during the Balkan wars concerned three main issues: Bulgaria believed firmly in its 'historic right' to possess Macedonia; Serbia also held claim over the Macedonians, which was that Macedonians belonged to Serbian people because they had similar customs; and Greeks claimed that Macedonia was part of their country alone. According to the Carnegie report, out of the total of 2,258,224 people living in Macedonia 1,181,336 were identified as Bulgarians. However it underlined that the official registers were from the time of the Ottoman administration, which counted

²² The special Commission of Inquiry was set up by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. Because the information coming from the region was fragmentary, insufficient and unreliable, the Commission's aim was to establish the facts and present to the West a trustworthy picture of the situation on the Balkans. Six countries became members of the Commission: US, Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, France. The representatives travelled together to Belgrade, Thessaloniki, Athens, Constantinople and Sofia. The Commission registered what it saw in the immediate

people only according to their religious affiliation. Consequently the Christian population of the 'exarchist group' were considered of Bulgarian nationality, whereas the 'patriarchists' were calculated as Greeks. Thus Macedonians were defined as Bulgarian by religion rather than nationality. ²³The Commission also reported on the 'extermination, emigration and assimilation' of the civil populations. It concluded that 'the war is waged not only by the armies but by the nations themselves', that 'veritable migration' was characteristic of the wars, and that there was forced conversion and assimilation of entire groups of people. Essentially the Commission concluded that the Balkan wars were ethnic wars. The driving idea behind the policies of each of the countries involved was to redraw the ethnic boundaries of the Balkans.

Yet despite the defeat the Bulgarian national ambition about unity with Macedonia remained a dream. Bulgarian national history had to deal with the concept of national loss. The complex development, which involved the creation of new states out of the Ottoman empire and the redrawing of borders - after the Russian-Turkish war of 1878 as well as the Balkan Wars - shaped the Macedonian question in Bulgaria through four main issues of hot debate: the territory of Macedonia, the nationality of the people of Macedonia, the state allegiance of Macedonia (i.e., independent or linked to another country), and the language of the Macedonians (i.e., Serbian, Bulgarian or Macedonian). The Bulgarian movement for independence at the end of the 19th century gave rise to the Bulgarian nationalist desire for unification: the incorporation of the Macedonian lands and people within the new Bulgarian state. The concept of the common historical land

aftermath of the Balkan wars and collected many memories of survivors, both military and civilian.

was used to legitimise the unification of Macedonia and Bulgaria. Bulgarian unification nationalism demanded above all the territorial unity of the Bulgarian nation-state. The settlement of the Macedonian question after the end of the Balkan Wars was the biggest disappointment of modern Bulgarian nationalism.

²³ See The Other Balkan Wars: A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect with a New Introduction and Reflections on the Present Conflict by George F. Kennan, (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993), p. 28.

VII. The Interwar Period

During the interwar period Bulgaria retained its aspirations for uniting with Macedonia. It continued to hope that the national borders would be revised, while Serbia and Greece supported the status quo. Bulgaria saw the First World War, which started in 1914, as a new chance for possible reconsideration of the Macedonian question. Bulgaria sided with the Central powers (Germany, Italy, Austria) in the war and they in turn promised Bulgaria the whole of Macedonia. This of course proved an irresistible temptation for Bulgaria. In September 1915 the Bulgarian army entered Vardar Macedonia and advanced towards Serbia proper and Aegean Macedonia. But the course of the war turned against the Central powers and in the autumn of 1918 the Entente (Britain, Russia, France) defeated the Bulgarian army near Thessaloniki. As a result the peace treaty of Neuilly was signed in November 1919. This marked the end of yet another stage of the development of the Bulgarian aspirations for national unification with Macedonia.

The persistence of the Macedonian question in Bulgarian life was not merely an irrational romantic ideal. The Macedonian question became a very serious anxiety for Bulgarian national consciousness. It raised difficult questions of national identity and ethnicity. If Macedonia was to develop further outside Bulgaria, the general question was whether a nation develops differently, if separated from its original core? Is it possible for a nation to diversify and transform into other nations? If the Bulgarian national identity was not firmly fixed, how could anyone be sure that Macedonia was not going to go its own way? The Macedonian question became the most serious question about the future of Bulgarian national integrity. Until the Second World War the core of the Macedonian

question in Bulgaria was their common religion, education, historic land and common historic enemy, the Ottomans. But this was soon to change.

VIII. The Bulgarian Communist Movement

With the end of the First World War the disintegration of the Ottoman empire was finalised. A new Balkan order was in place, and the Bulgarian position was not enviable, as Stavrianos points out: 'Bulgaria was left as the sole revisionist power in the Balkans, having fallen from second to last place in the Balkan hierarchy. The influx of refugees from Macedonia and the activities of their IMRO organisation made irredentism a prime issue in the interwar years.'²⁴ Macedonia constituted the so-called 'Southern Serbia', part of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, founded in 1918, which in 1929 was renamed to Yugoslavia.

The Macedonian question also became central to the emerging communist movement in the Balkans at the beginning of the 20th century. Similar to official Balkan governmental politics in Macedonia, it was locked in a triangle between the conflicting interests of the young communist parties in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. The main factor, which the Balkan communist movements had to take into account in relation to the Macedonian question, was the position of the Soviet communist leadership. This was far from easy to do so. On one hand, Balkan communists had to design a concept which was not based on the nationalist claims in each respective country but could still appeal to the respective communities. On the other hand, any local idea had to be approved by Moscow.

The Macedonian question was central to the Balkan communists but totally dependant on the Comintern's policy. The Macedonian question became even more complicated dispute over who should be in control of the issue within the communist movement.

The most effective way of conducting Macedonian affairs seemed to be to make

Macedonia part of some kind of a federal Balkan structure. On a general level this idea derived from traditional communist thinking, which favoured the creation of large state units. As Connor argues, at this time, the idea of establishing one larger unit, out of the fragmented South-East Europe, was a 'throwback to Karl Marx's bias for large units over small, regardless of ethnic distributional patterns'.²⁵

Creating large federal units was the experience of the Soviet communists with the foundation of the USSR. The idea of a Balkan federation looked like a good solution to the Macedonian question. It envisioned separation of the Macedonian regions from Greece and Yugoslavia and uniting them as independent political units under the umbrella of a Balkan Communist Federation.²⁶ The Bulgarian communists favoured the idea of a Balkan federation and the traditional minimum-programme of BCP was the creation of an independent Macedonia. Bulgarian communists would rather see Macedonia non-aligned, if not included within Bulgaria, but by no means in one state with Serbia. Independent or some kind of autonomous Macedonia was traditionally seen as an acceptable stage on the way to the integration of all Bulgarian people in one state. Both of these projects, Macedonia being a part of a Balkan federation or an independent country, were theoretically compatible with the Leninist theory of the right of self-determination. Therefore the idea of a Balkan federation seemed appropriate from the Comintern's point of view. It was supposed to end oppression of small nations, and also to blur ethnic sentiments into a communist identity, eliminating irredentism. But an agreement over Macedonia was never achieved. For Bulgarian communists, the main

²⁴ L.S. Stavrianos, The Balkans 1815-1914, (Hinsdale, Illinois: Dryden Press, 1958), p.592.

²⁵ Walker Connor, The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 130-132.

problem was how to negotiate relations with the Yugoslav communists over the Macedonian question. At that time the Bulgarians enjoyed Moscow's patronage and used it to promote their domination over other communist parties in the Balkans. In contrast, Yugoslav communists opposed the idea of Macedonia being part of a Balkan federation. In general Yugoslav communists saw the entire plan for a communist federative structure as turning the Balkans simply into an administrative organ of Moscow. Therefore Soviet command of the Macedonian question further deepened their disagreements with the Bulgarian communists over Macedonia. The Balkan federation did not make the communist cause in the Balkans more popular. Apart from the fact that the communist parties had to work underground for most of the interwar period, the requirement to obey the Comintern was seen as a great disadvantage when it came to national questions in the Balkans. For the Yugoslavs, Greeks and Romanians, receiving orders from the Soviets was often an embarrassment. But for the Bulgarian communists, because of their particular involvement with the Soviet communist tradition, this was not so. Moreover the Macedonian project, as envisioned by the Balkan communist federation, was not the worst option from the point of view of Bulgarian national interests. At this time the main attraction was clearly the possibility to dictate the Macedonian question through the Comintern, where the Bulgarian communists were represented strongly.

Yet at the same time the total dependence of the BCP on Moscow made it impossible to articulate its own policy, which could have attracted more support for the Bulgarian communists. Although 'Macedonia for the Macedonians' was the general concept of the BCP, the Comintern's position shifted according to Soviet interests, not Bulgarian interests. As Rothschild argued: "The Soviet leaders demonstrated that far from having had a definite Macedonian policy based on principle, they simply considered the area as a

²⁶ See Stavrianos, The Balkans, p. 614.

prize to be awarded to their most promising and obedient pupil among the Balkan communist parties'.²⁷ However the Bulgarian communists were not awarded as expected. The way the Second World War ended in Yugoslavia as well as the new role of the Soviets in Eastern Europe dramatically changed the course of the Macedonian question and the whole Balkan history in general.

²⁷ Joseph, Rothchild. The Communist Party of Bulgaria: Origins and Development, 1883-1936, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 256.

IX. Communist Politics during the Bulgarian Occupation (1941-44)

With the outbreak of the Second World War Bulgaria joined the Axis Powers ²⁸ and in December 1941 declared war on the Western Allies. In April the same year the Bulgarian government broke diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia and on April 19, only two days after Yugoslavia's capitulation, Bulgarian forces entered the country and occupied Macedonia.

Bulgarian language was introduced into schools and churches in Macedonia and new Bulgarian speaking cultural institutions were built. In June 1942 new citizenship legislation was passed. According to the law Bulgarian citizenship was offered to all people of Bulgarian descent living in Vardar or Aegean Macedonia. The Bulgarian occupation of Macedonia was the biggest challenge faced by the Bulgarian communists in relation to the Macedonian question in the pre-communist period. They had to deal with two complicated questions: how was the resistance in Macedonia to be organised and what should their relationship with the Yugoslav resistance movement (*'partisans'*) be in Macedonia?

Formally Bulgaria was in the role of an occupier of Macedonia, controlled by Germany. Yet the meaning of the occupation ran very deep in the Bulgarian mind. The

²⁸ The Axis Powers was the coalition headed by Germany, Italy, and Japan that opposed the Allied Powers in World War II. The alliance originated in a series of agreements between Germany and Italy, followed by the proclamation of an 'axis' binding Rome and Berlin (Oct. 25, 1936) and then by the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact against the Soviet Union (Nov. 25, 1936). The connection was strengthened by a full military and political alliance between Germany and Italy (the Pact of Steel, May 22, 1939), and the Tripartite Pact signed by all three powers on Sept. 27, 1940.

Macedonian occupation was seen as a great step forward towards the fulfilment of the Bulgarian national dream, unification with Macedonia. Here lay the communists' anxiety about opposing the Bulgarian occupation of Macedonia. Any communist anti-Bulgarian activities in Macedonia could alienate them from the ground support they needed. No section of the Bulgarian population which would support such activities. The people of Macedonian origin who were refugees in Bulgaria from the Balkan wars and the First World War were also encouraged to settle in the occupied lands and their biggest hope was that Macedonia would remain Bulgarian. Yet Bulgarian communists had to co-operate with the Yugoslav communists, who saw them as supporters of Bulgarian nationalism in Macedonia. The BCP tried to portray the communist resistance in Macedonia as an anti-fascist movement, opposing the tsarist Bulgarian regime but not everything Bulgarian. In contrast the Yugoslav communist party, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), thought that the resistance in Macedonia was an armed struggle against the entire Bulgarian presence, which dominated Macedonia since the occupation. Josip Broz Tito, the leader of the Yugoslav partisans, advocated resistance to the Germans as well as to the Bulgarian administration in Macedonia.²⁹ Thus BCP and the LCY had conflicting views on the very essence of the communist resistance in Macedonia. The disagreements became the major source of contention between the two communist parties. The BCP called for 'one territory - one party'. This practically meant that control had to be in their own hands. Todor Pavlov, the prominent ideologist of the Bulgarian communists, who was from Macedonia himself, issued a letter denying that Macedonians were separate people.³⁰

²⁹ See Walter R. Roberts, Tito, Mihailovic and the Allies, 1941-1945, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987).

³⁰ See Pero Korovar and Orde Ivanovski (eds.), Filip Korzenski (tr.), The Historical Truth: The Progressive Social Circles in Bulgaria and Pirin Macedonia on the

Thus the Bulgarian communists found it impossible to distance themselves from the issues of nationalism in relation to Macedonia. They tried to balance the call for a united 'anti-fascist' struggle against the Bulgarian state with the overwhelming Bulgarian desire to see Macedonia included into Bulgaria. But the result was a major confusion within the communist movement. The BCP was caught in the conundrum of the general difficulty in reconciling national aspirations and internationalist communist ideals.

The Yugoslav communists tackled the problem in a different manner. They were clear that the Macedonian communist movement must remain loyal to the Yugoslav leadership and refuse to obey the BCP. They were also clear that any help to the Bulgarian comrades could play in the hands of the Bulgarian nationalist aspirations towards Macedonia. The Bulgarian-Yugoslav controversies were highlighted when it had to be decided who was to lead the communist movement in Macedonia. The head of the Macedonian Communist Party from 1940 until 1941 was Metodi Shatarov-Sharlo, who was close to the Bulgarians and spoke about 'free Soviet Macedonia'. The Yugoslav communists, aware of the close ties between the Bulgarian and Soviet communists, were not happy with this idea. Indeed Shatariv-Sharlo's orientation suited the pro-Soviet policy of the Bulgarian communists, who read 'Soviet Macedonia' as 'Soviet Bulgaria'. But the Soviet concern was not how to please the Bulgarian communists, but rather how to retain control over both the Bulgarian and the Yugoslav communist parties. Moscow acted as an arbiter in the dispute between the Bulgarian and Yugoslav communists over Shatarov-Sharlo and decided that he was not suitable to lead the Macedonian communists. They approved of his expulsion from Macedonia on the grounds of

Macedonian National Question. Documents, Studies, Resolutions, Appeals and Published Articles, (Skopje: Kultura, 1983).

mishandling the political situation there. Consequently the Bulgarian and Yugoslav communists jointly condemned him. Moscow and Bulgaria accepted the Yugoslav approach, subjecting him to severe party criticism, but sparing his life as well as his name - he was not labelled a class enemy.³¹ The leadership of Tito was a decisive in the dispute. During the Bulgarian occupation of Macedonia Moscow favoured Tito because he organised an armed struggle against the Germans, whereas Bulgarian communists hardly participated in armed resistance. Tito was in charge of the Macedonian leadership and gradually reduced the Bulgarian influence over the Macedonian communists to a minimum. At the end of 1942 Tito decided to send one of his best aide to take over the military and political activities in the Macedonian communist movement. Svetozar Vukmanovic-Tempo, a Montenegrin, shared Tito's beliefs that Macedonia should engage in active resistance. Tito was a different type of communist leader compared to the Bulgarians. Unlike Dimitrov and Kolarov, Tito did not rely on the Soviets to solve the Yugoslav national questions. He had his own ideas. This gave him the opportunity to act much more independently when it came to the Bulgarian-Yugoslav dispute over Macedonia.

Meanwhile the Soviets continued to envision Macedonia as united republic and part of some kind of a Balkan federative structure, designed after the model of the Soviet republics. Effectively this meant that according to the Soviets any future Macedonian republic should be placed under Soviet auspices. But the Comintern by and large also thought that the part of Macedonia which was in Bulgaria (Pirin Macedonia) would have to be united with the future Macedonian republic. As Clissold concluded, the thinking behind Moscow's policy on Macedonia was as follows: 'Bulgarian people were staunchly pro-Russian. They would let themselves be guided by what Moscow thought good for

³¹ See Tsola Dragoicheva, Takava e istinata, (Sofia: Partizdat, 1981).

them. And if there was any opposition ... from the Macedonian emigrant residents in Bulgaria who were a large and influential body bitterly opposed to any abandonment by Bulgaria of her Macedonian provinces...Bulgaria could always be reminded that she was in the position of an ex-Axis satellite and must bear the consequences.’³²

The Soviet position on the Macedonian question was ambivalent and totally politicised. When the Soviet policy was to distance itself from the Yugoslav state in the interwar years, the Comintern encouraged Macedonian separatism. After the invasion of the Axis in Yugoslavia in 1941, it appeared that the Bulgarian occupation of Macedonia may be accepted as definite. It also looked as if the Soviets approved of the Bulgarian communists’ control of the Macedonian communists as long as it complied with their orders. In less than a year though, when the Yugoslav partisan movement gained momentum, the Comintern decided that the Macedonian communists should be controlled by the Yugoslav communist leadership alone. Without the support of the Soviets, Bulgarian communists seemed lost and incapable of making any decisions.

At the same time the Comintern’s directive was for both parties to support the idea of self-determination of the Macedonian people: ‘Macedonia should remain with Yugoslavia on the grounds of practicality and expediency...the Bulgarian communist party members who find themselves on Yugoslav territory should co-operate and give all possible help to Yugoslavia, and both parties should adopt an attitude in favour of self-determination for the Macedonian people’.³³ Supporting Macedonian self-determination must have

³² Stephen Clissold, Whirlwind: An account of Marshal Tito’s Rise to Power, (London: The Cresset Press, 1969), p.146.

³³ Stephen Clissold (ed.), Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union 1939-1973: A Documentary Survey, (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 153.

seemed the last option left for the Bulgarian communists, who so much counted on the Soviets to help them solve their most important national question. But Moscow used the disagreements between the Yugoslavs and the Bulgarians whenever it was necessary to confront disobedience from its Bulgarian protégé. The friction between them over the partisan tactics in Macedonia and the future status of Pirin Macedonia remained explosive. Although the Comintern acted hesitantly, trying to keep both sides under control, Tito was favoured in relation to Macedonia. In theory the Comintern's position was 'the Balkans for the Balkan peoples' and 'Macedonia for the Macedonians', but in reality they wanted to satisfy Yugoslav demands as an award for their strong opposition to the Germans.

By 1943 the success of Tito's resistance cost the Bulgarian communists their initiative in the Macedonian affairs. The Bulgarian communists' confidence was badly undermined. As Oren wrote: 'From that point on, the Bulgarian Communists, who had hitherto thought themselves as unequalled by their Balkan counterparts found themselves in a secondary position'.³⁴ This was a big blow to the Bulgarian communists, who had hoped to acquire the image of national saviours.

³⁴ Nissan Oren, Bulgarian Communism: The Road to Power 1934-1944, (East European Studies and of Columbia University and Research Institute of Communist Affairs, Columbia University), (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 199.

X. The Failure of Bulgaria's Macedonian Policy

At the beginning of the occupation many people in Macedonia met the Bulgarians enthusiastically as liberators. But because of their assimilative policy this image was soon transformed and they were seen as conquerors. As a result, the occupation of Macedonia, for which the Bulgarians so long dreamed, succeeded mainly in creating hostility towards them. The Bulgarian administration forced Bulgarian identity on the Macedonians and tried to eliminate any different perceptions of ethnicity or culture among the population. All public affairs were supposed to be conducted in Bulgarian language and everyone was supposed to assert his or her Bulgarian nationality. All educational, cultural and social institutions were transformed according to Bulgarian instructions. Yet Macedonians were not united in their response to the Bulgarian policy. Some people welcomed the Bulgarians, but others saw the Bulgarians as new rulers of Macedonia who would merely substitute Serbian dominance for Bulgarian. The disappointment with the Bulgarian policy fed into the rise of Macedonian nationalism with its claim that Macedonia is Macedonian only. It became increasingly apparent that from this point onwards that Macedonian nationalism was to be the main contestant of the idea that Macedonia was Bulgarian.

The Bulgarian administration did not have any particular policy towards the numerous minorities living in Macedonia, including Albanians, Serbs, Vlachs, Turks, Jews, Gypsies and others. The Bulgarian idea of Macedonia seemed blind to the ethnic diversity of the country. This was so partly because the biggest minority in Macedonia, the Albanians, were concentrated in the Italian-occupied territories of Macedonia during the war. But the Bulgarian administration did not provide any arrangements for those members of ethnic minorities living under Bulgarian occupation. The Jews paid the price of the

highest order for this policy, when the Bulgarian administration, under the Nazi orders, deported them to death camps, stripped of their previous Yugoslav or other citizenship.³⁵

The Bulgarian communist strategy during the occupation of Macedonia was to rely on the Soviet policy and hope that it could be squared with Bulgarian national ambitions. But the lack of a strong Bulgarian-led partisan movement in Macedonia, as well as in Bulgaria proper, undermined the position of the BCP in the eyes of the Soviets, particularly when compared to their Yugoslav comrades. In the end, the Bulgarian communists lost their influence in Macedonia and the Macedonian communist movement became closely associated with the Yugoslav partisans. This development during the course of the war led Macedonia to become a part of the new Yugoslav federation established in 1945 under the leadership of Tito. The People's Republic of Macedonia was legitimated as a constituent part of the new Yugoslav communist state.

Did Bulgarian communists gave up completely on the Macedonian question? Did communist Bulgaria accept that as painful as it was the loss of Macedonia was simply a fact of Bulgarian national history? How was the BCP going to promote Soviet-style internationalism under the new circumstances? The answer to all these questions was complex as under communism Bulgaria was bound to re-experience the Macedonian question.

³⁵ A full account of the Jewish deportations from the Bulgarian occupied territories during the Second World War is presented in chapter 6 of this thesis.

XI. The Macedonian Question during Communism (1944-89)

After the end of the Second World War, the BCP became the new political ruler of Bulgaria. During 45 years of government the BCP could not develop a consistent policy on the Macedonian question. It revised its views several times and accordingly Bulgarian communist policy also changed. The two main factors which dictated the BCP approach to Macedonian issues were the consequences of the split between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in 1948 and the change in the development of nationalism under communism in Bulgaria as dictated by the BCP. Bulgarian relations with the USSR remained central to the way the BCP conducted all affairs, including the Macedonian question. If Moscow could not tolerate Tito, Bulgaria had to also reconsider its relations with Yugoslavia. And the Macedonian question was at the core of the Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations. Equally important was the fluctuation of the BCP's views on Bulgarian nationalism in relation to the Macedonian question. Although initially the BCP supported the idea that the Macedonian nation existed as a separate entity, from 1948 onwards this was denied. Instead the BCP declared that there was no Macedonian identity in Bulgaria, though there may be one in Yugoslav Macedonia. This was an obvious change in the communist approach, but the BCP decided that such an attitude was useful for two purposes. First, by asserting that Bulgaria has no claims over Macedonian identity in Yugoslavia, communist Bulgaria distanced itself from Yugoslavia. In this way the BCP reassured Moscow that its instructions were being taken seriously. Second, declaring that there was no Macedonian population in Bulgaria was in accord with the growing communist idea of Bulgaria as an ethnically homogenous country. During the same time the BCP encouraged Jewish emigration from Bulgaria (1947-49) and an agreement about Turkish resettlement was under way. However it would be wrong to suggest that the BCP planned the parallel development of these issues

concerning nationalities in Bulgaria. Each national problem was dealt with according to the political circumstances of the moment.

In this sense the BCP followed the direction given by Moscow on the Macedonian question. But the policy also seemed like a good option for Bulgaria at the time. The denial of Macedonian identity in communist Bulgaria was well squared with the project of establishing communist Bulgaria as an ethnic nation-state.

The most crucial development of the Macedonian question in the Balkans since the collapse of the Ottoman empire was the establishment of the People's Republic of Macedonia in Tito's Yugoslavia. The status of the republic was the first step towards a legitimate Macedonian nation and state. A Macedonian identity with its own officially recognised language, culture and institutions was established a separate national identity. Consequently the whole Bulgarian debate about who Macedonia belonged to was transformed into a different question: if there was a Macedonian nation in Yugoslavia, was there a Macedonian national minority in Pirin Macedonia, the Bulgarian part of Macedonia?

In 1946, Georgi Dimitrov, the first communist leader of Bulgaria stated: 'The fact has often been disregarded that the majority of the Macedonian people have already been organised in a state and a nation within the framework of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as the People's republic of Macedonia. Using this republic as a basis, the other sections of the Macedonian people will be united to it in the near future, especially Macedonia of the present Pirin region. There are no three Macedonians. There is only one Macedonia and its major part is represented by the established Macedonian People's

republic'.³⁶ Thus Dimitrov agreed with the USSR opinion that Macedonia should ultimately aim towards independence. Further on the old idea of a Balkan communist federation was discussed by Dimitrov, Stalin and Tito.³⁷ But there were many disagreements about the possible structure of such a federation. The main issue was again that Yugoslavia refused to accept the unconditional Soviet control, which the BCP did not even question. The split between Yugoslavia and the Soviets put an end to this debate. Yugoslav and Bulgarian communists also differed over the status of Pirin Macedonia. After the capitulation of Bulgaria at the end of the Second World War, in September 1944, there was a campaign to separate Pirin Macedonia from Bulgaria. The Bulgarian communists blocked it successfully with the support of the Soviets, who opposed any separation of Pirin Macedonia from Bulgaria. But the compromise was their co-operation in building the Macedonian People's Republic within the Yugoslav federation. In December 1946 the Bulgarian Institute for the Scientific Study of Macedonia, based in Sofia, which disseminated Bulgarian ideas in Macedonia, was closed and its archives transferred to Skopje. This marked formally and highly symbolically the end of the promotion of the Bulgarian identity in post-war Macedonia.

Later, the BCP decided that Macedonian culture should be developed in Pirin Macedonia. In 1948 the Bulgarian government introduced the study of Macedonian language and history in the schools of Pirin Macedonia and many teachers arrived there from Yugoslavia to re-educate the population. This policy was exactly the reverse of the

³⁶ Korovar and Ivanovski, The Historical Truth, p. 171.

³⁷ In 1947 Bulgarian and Yugoslavian communists negotiated an agreement in Bled for abolishing the border in Pirin Macedonia. Teachers in history and language were sent from Yugoslav Macedonia to Pirin Macedonia. Macedonian National Theatre was opened in Gorna Djumaja. The newspapers *Nova Macedonia* and *Pirinski Vestnik* were published in the Macedonian language.

one during the occupation of Macedonia, when Bulgarians tried to educate Macedonians into being Bulgarian. Naturally there was confusion among the people of Pirin Macedonia.

Despite the Bulgarian co-operation in the promotion of Macedonian identity, relations between Yugoslav Macedonia and the Bulgarian authorities were tense. Bulgarians often found the presence of Yugoslav Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia arrogant and offensive. Pirin Macedonia became a place for confrontation between the two communist countries. Then Bulgarian communists' attitude was changed again. By the end of the same year of 1948, Bulgarian authorities introduced the opposite policy, now seeking the de-Macedonianisation of the Pirin region. The reasons for this shift in Bulgarian communist policy were rather complex. Shoup suggests the split between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union at that time was a major incentive behind the new Bulgarian policy.³⁸ Crampton however believes that 'the dispute between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia was more complicated than a case of Sofia following Moscow's example'. Crampton argues that Bulgarian communists were not really prepared to alienate Pirin Macedonia, and once Tito and the Yugoslavs were ostracised from the Soviets, 'nationalist interest could again be squared with proletarian internationalism'.³⁹

At the core of the change in Bulgarian policy seems to have been national sentiment about Macedonia, which remained strong among the Bulgarian public as well as among the Bulgarian communists. Although the BCP accepted the existence of Yugoslav

³⁸ Paul S. Shoup, Communism and the Yugoslav National Question, East Central European Studies of Columbia University, (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 155.

³⁹ Crampton, A Short History, pp. 171-172.

Macedonia, the mere thought of recognising Macedonian identity in Bulgaria was not seriously entertained. Indeed the change in the Soviet policy towards Yugoslavia suited the Bulgarian communists only too well. Freed from the responsibility of taking the decision themselves they could enjoy its result, which was to be seen as defenders of the Bulgarian nation. Communists needed to popularise themselves when they were still the new masters of Bulgaria. During these years there was still a segment of Bulgarian political life, which was about opposition and public opinion mattered. In 1946 the remaining active opposition in Bulgaria expressed sharp criticism over ideas of unifying Pirin Macedonia and Yugoslav Macedonia. The Macedonian community in Bulgaria was also still active, particularly in the capital Sofia. It attacked the communist government by saying that the BCP mishandled the whole idea of Macedonian nationality. Besides the Yugoslavs themselves thought that it was too risky to go so far as to claim Pirin Macedonia from Bulgaria, which made it easier for the BCP to oppose them. The Soviet split with Yugoslavia gave the BCP the chance to restrict their views over Macedonian issues to Pirin Macedonia. And this seemed better than nothing.

From 1948 onwards any ideas of open co-operation between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria were punishable in Bulgaria. The communist world was living under Stalin and any national questions were subject to persecution. The BCP under Dimitrov organised the show trial of Traicho Kostov, a pro-Soviet communist accused of having the wrong policy on the Macedonian question. He was tried and executed in 1948.⁴⁰ His case

⁴⁰See Protsesut sreshtu Traicho Kostov i negovata grupa, (Sofia: 1949). Traicho Kostov was executed after a staged trial on 17 December 1949. The fifth article of the accusation stated that together with the Yugoslav party leaders, Tito, Kardel, Djilas and Rankovich, he was negotiating: 'common action against the Bulgarian national sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence by attaching it to Yugoslavia and, above all by separating

showed that the Macedonian question was very volatile and had a great potential for misuse. Those communists who believed that they could easily combine a nationalist policy over Macedonia with Soviet principles were badly mistaken, for Moscow could change it any time according to its own agenda. In 1948 at its 5th congress, the BCP stated that Pirin Macedonia was Bulgarian. This assertion aimed to reinforce the Bulgarian-Soviet alliance and cut off any possibilities of being accused of Titoism. In 1963 a party plenum decided that the population in Pirin Macedonia does not constitute Macedonian minority.

Pirin region on behalf of Yugoslav Macedonia.' He was rehabilitated after the April plenum of the BCP in 1956.

XII. Macedonian Censuses in Communist Bulgaria

Bulgarian communist regime considered census statistics important. The number of the Macedonian population in Pirin Macedonia as reflected in the censuses of 1956 and 1965 caused controversies between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The Bulgarian data kept changing correspondingly to the position of the BCP on the existence of Macedonian nationality within Bulgaria. In 1946 there was a census in Bulgaria and it is generally believed that Bulgarian communist authorities pressurised the population of Pirin Macedonia to register as Macedonians. The results were not published by the Bulgarian authorities but Yugoslav sources claim that 252,908 people declared themselves as Macedonians.⁴¹ Although this figure has been disputed since, it has also been established that the census of 1946 registered that more than 70% of the population of Pirin Macedonia declared themselves as Macedonians.⁴² The results of the census were in accord with the recognition of separate Macedonian identity by Bulgarian communists.

The next census was in 1956 and it recorded the figure of 187, 789, which was less than the result of the previous census. This was after BCP started a process of reconsidering its position on the Macedonian question in Bulgaria and moving away from the recognition of a separate Macedonian national identity. The census was taken only months after the April Plenum of 1956 which marked the beginning of the process of de-Stalinization in Bulgaria. The smaller number of Macedonians which was recorded was opposed by Belgrade.

⁴¹ See Hugh Poulton, The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict, (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1993), pp. 106-107.

⁴² See Miliana Kaimakova (ed.), Istoria na Bulgaria, (Sofia:Standart,1999-2000),p. 321.

In assessing the results of the census of 1956 the international relations within the Soviet block should be taken into account. The census was taken just after the first reapproachment between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in 1955. Until the autumn of 1957 the official course was one of improving the relations between USSR and Yugoslavia. It is highly unlikely that BCP would decide to go against it, which would have been the case if decided to encourage recording of dramatically lower number of Macedonians in Bulgaria. It seems more probable that the 1956 census was conducted without pressure, at least not on the same scale as during the 1946 census to register as Macedonian.

Things have changed though by 1965 when the next census was taken. This time it resulted in a dramatically lower figure compared to the previous two censuses and dropped to 8, 750. With this census the BCP asserted its new policy of non-recognition of a separate Macedonian identity in Bulgaria and defended it as a correction of the previous policy for encouraging the population of Pirin Macedonia to register as 'Macedonians'.⁴³ The Yugoslavs denounced the results of 1965 census as they appeared threatening to the affirmation of the Macedonian nationality in Yugoslav Macedonia. Most importantly relations between USSR and Yugoslavia once again changed. The reapproachment of 1955 lasted shortly and with the Soviet invasion in Hungary in 1956 and the consequent violation of Hungarian-Yugoslav agreement on the protection of Imre Nagy relations between Belgrade and Moscow were strained, and by the time he was executed in the summer of 1958 Soviet-Yugoslav relations were in serious crisis. Bulgaria must have felt free to exercise its own policy concerning the existence of Macedonian identity as it was unlikely to be categoriactly sanctioned by Moscow in favour of Belgrade. Until 1965 when the census was taken Bulgaria and Yugoslavia

engaged in exchanging conflicting claims about Macedonian nationality in Bulgaria as well as Bulgarian nationality in Yugoslav Macedonia, but they were limited to 'historical debates'.⁴³

It has been a point of dispute who was right in the debate between Yugoslav and Bulgarian communists regarding the reliability of the statistics of 1965. The BCP claimed that the pressure on the population to register as 'Macedonian' was lifted and therefore the data was correct. In support of this claim is the fact that in the last census of the Bulgarian population of 1992 (after the fall of communism) the number 10,800 was close to the one of 1965. Also as King suggests, if in 1965 the BCP wanted to declare that there were no Macedonians in Bulgaria there would have not been any number of Macedonians registered.

It seems certain that pressure for identifying as Macedonian was exerted in 1946 when Macedonian culture was promoted in Pirin Macedonia in accord with the idea of the existence of a separate Macedonain nation promoted by the BCP. But it seems equally probable that in 1965 there was no need to put the same pressure in order to register the majority of the population as Bulgarian. The BCP did not have to exersice pressure on the population in Bulgaria in order to popularise the idea that Macedonians were Bulgarians. It was rather a question of promoting this position inside the BCP in order to gain popularity in the country. For traditionally the majority of the Bulgarian Macedonians considered themselves as being a legitimate part of the Bulgarian nation - as opposed to a minority claiming separate Macedonian identity. This is not to say that the censuses were not politicised. But the BCP policy of recognition of Macedonian

⁴³ See King, *Minorities under Communism*, 1973,p. 96.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.201.

nationality in Bulgaria until 1948 was exceptional in the history of the Macedonian politics in Bulgaria. It lasted shortly and was denied by the BCP itself.

The result of the first Macedonian census was supposed to implement the instruction given from above, which was to confirm the idea of Macedonian identity in Bulgaria. The following two censuses had the opposite aim. They were supposed to demonstrate that there was no Macedonian identity in Bulgaria in such numbers as to constitute a viable national identity. Thus the censuses also demonstrated graphically the changes in communist policy: people were first made to define themselves as Macedonians, and in a less than a couple of decades, the orders have changed and they were allowed to identify as Bulgarians. This policy intensified people's insecurity about their national identity. Many people of the Pirin Macedonia feared to identify themselves in terms of nationality. They secretly hated the idea that somebody else not only had a definition for them but also kept changing it according to some abstract and invisible regulations.

XIII. The Consolidation of Bulgarian Nationalism under Communism

From the 1960s the communist government in Bulgaria developed a more coherent idea about the national questions and called for a united position among Bulgarian scholars. The aim was to assert that Bulgaria was an ethnically homogenous nation. A number of publications were produced in support of this idea. Some of them were designed to be used as official party documents, but the new party position was disseminated also through history books, new research on the Bulgarian literature and folklore. The most precise description of the BCP policy on the Macedonian question during the 1970s was summarised in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' declaration, published under the title 'About the Comprehensive development of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations'.⁴⁵ The declaration focused on claims about the existence of Macedonian minority in Bulgaria as well as the establishment of the Yugoslav Macedonian republic. Three basic principles on the Macedonian question were outlined in view of the BCP decisions. First it asserted that the Macedonian question was an internal problem of Bulgarian politics and therefore no one else should interfere in it. This statement was directed towards the LYC as it never missed the chance to publicise its own views on the way Bulgaria was handling the Macedonian question. Second, it claimed that the population in Pirin Macedonia centred around the town of Blagoevgrad, was both historically and at present Bulgarian. Third it declared that the process of the creation of Macedonian nation in Yugoslavia was anti-Bulgarian.

The declaration underlined that the national question had been solved in Bulgaria on the basis of Marxist-Leninist theory and accused the LYC's leadership, as well as the Yugoslav media, of mounting an anti-Bulgarian campaign and undermining the

internationalist thinking of communism. Yugoslavia was also accused of giving prominence to national questions above social issues, which were much more important because they concerned class identity. It asserted that Yugoslav policy was in breach of Leninist principles on the national question. The intense campaign led by the BCP in the Pirin district was declared a result of a long lasting pressure in this period (since the end of the Second World War) for a forced introduction of non-Bulgarian consciousness in the Macedonian region of Bulgaria.⁴⁶ Essentially the document defended the BCP policy, denied any past co-operation between the communist movements in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia over Macedonia, and made it plain, that there was no Macedonian national minority in Bulgaria. These points were also made by a document published by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences called 'The Wholeness of the Bulgarian Language Now and in the Past'.⁴⁷ It explained that there was no Macedonian language because Bulgarian was the original language spoken in the Macedonian lands from times immemorial. The argument was based on the assumption that language affiliation is a given, not a subject to choice and that Bulgaria had one language only in its entire history. Still, the biggest problem remained how to justify the change in BCP policy on Macedonia? The Bulgarian communists fiercely defended themselves and blamed everyone else for Bulgarian failures in Macedonia. During the 1950s many Bulgarian history books asserted that by occupying Macedonia, Bulgaria had no chance to have an independent policy. Being a satellite of Hitler's Germany Bulgaria made mistakes, which otherwise would not have been committed. ⁴⁸ Later the communist historiography blamed the petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, which could not resist the temptations of

⁴⁵Za vsestranoto razvitie na Bulgaro-Yugoslavskite otnoshenia, (Sofia, 1978).

⁴⁶Ibid.,p. 17.

⁴⁷ Quoted from Poulton, Who Are the Macedonians?, p. 116.

⁴⁸ See Kratka Istoria na Bulgaria, (Sofia: 'Nauka I Izkustvo', 1958), pp. 312-317.

Bulgarian nationalism and nurtured certain illusions about it during the occupation of Macedonia.⁴⁹ Bulgarian communism claimed to have been led by the principles of internationalism by emphasising that all mistakes in the past were committed by the Bulgarian bourgeoisie, which suffered from the excesses of nationalism.⁵⁰ The publication of the memoirs of Tsola Dragoicheva in 1979 was a culmination of the controversies over the BCP's past and present policy over Macedonia. Dragoicheva described the Bulgarian communists as innocent victims in the hands of their Yugoslav brothers, who plotted for dominance in Macedonia. She underlined that the population in Pirin Macedonia was Bulgarian by character.⁵¹

At the same time Bulgarian folklorists and ethnographers sought to prove the ethnic Bulgarian character of Macedonian culture past and present. Most of the research was carried out by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The emphasis was on the scientific evidence collected in Pirin Macedonia. Todor Iv. Zhivkov, the head of the Institute of Folklore Studies, asserted that each nation had its own ethnic history and culture which was inherited, not created. He claimed that the oral, written and musical tradition in Pirin Macedonia was wholesome Bulgarian culture, though he did not say explicitly that

⁴⁹ See D.Kosev, Hr. Hristov and D. Angelov, Kratka Istoria na Bulgaria, 2nd ed., (Sofia, Nauka i Izkustvo, 1966), p.276.

⁵⁰ See Alexander Fol, Vasil Guzelev, Nikolai Genchev, Konstantin Kosev, Ilcho Dimitrov, Andrei Pantev, Milcho Lalkov and Kostadin Petrov, Kratka istoria na Bulgaria, (Sofia: Izdatelstvo Nauka i Izkustvo, 1981), pp.380-381.

⁵¹ See Tsola Dragoicheva, Iz moite spomeni: Na klasovi internatsionalisticheski pozitsii, (Sofia: Partizdat, 1979). Dragoicheva was a member of the central Committee of the BCP since 1966. In her book she explained that the BCP made mistakes over the Macedonian policy under the pressure of the YCP and blamed Serbian chauvinism.

Macedonia was Bulgarian.⁵² Denying the Yugoslav account of events in Macedonia was also a central task of Bulgarian history, which was mobilised to defend the Bulgarian nation. Bulgarian scholars argued passionately that Macedonia could not claim separate ethnicity and that prior the Second World War there was no Macedonian nation.⁵³

By the end of the 1970s BCP made it clear that the Macedonian question in Bulgaria was solved by the proclamation that communist Bulgaria was a one nation-state with no ethnic diversity. The national questions in communist Eastern Europe were on the rise and Bulgaria was no exception. During this time most countries of the Soviet bloc had already exposed dissatisfaction with Moscow. The Hungarian events of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968, the rejection of the Sovietisation by the Romanians after 1968, the break-up between Albania and the Soviet Union in 1961 - these were all acts of disagreement with Soviet policy. Yugoslavia kept its distance from the Soviet Union but experienced the first serious nationalist dissent during the 'Croatian spring' movement in 1972. Bulgaria was the communist state most loyal to the Soviets and because of the hostility between the USSR and Yugoslavia, the feeling was that it could afford to take a firmer stand on the Bulgarian aspect of the Macedonian question with no particularly unfavourable consequences. There would be no 'Bulgarian spring.' Moreover no one knew what the Soviet leadership really thought about the Macedonian question. The definitions of national culture under communism repeated the Stalinist slogan 'national in form, socialist in content'. But Breznev's doctrine from 1968 for 'socialist self-

⁵² See Todor Iv. Zhivkov, Introduction. Edinstvo na bulgarskata folklorna traditsia. By Todor Iv. Zhivkov, Dimtrina Mitseva, Evgenia Stoikova, Stefana Ianeva (eds.), (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata Academia na Naukite, 1981), p. 17.

⁵³ See M. Voinov, L. Panaiotov, D. Kosev and D. Hristov (eds.), Dokumenti i Materiali za Istoriata na Bulgarskia Narod, (Sofia: Bulgarska Academia na Naukite: Institut za Istoria, 1969).

determination' showed clearly that the Soviet authorities were not going to tolerate independent national modifications of communism as attempted by Hungary or Czechoslovakia. Therefore with no risk of going against the 'big brother', Bulgarian communism succeeded in promoting ethnic Bulgarian nationalism, which relentlessly revised the Macedonian question.

XIV. The Macedonian-Bulgarian Language Dispute

The question of a Macedonian language was a major issue to which communist Bulgaria had to respond since the establishment of the Yugoslav republic of Macedonia. Again the BCP had an ambiguous policy. The main line of communist Bulgaria was never to deny openly the existence of the Macedonian language. At the same time the emphasis was on the idea that there was only one Bulgarian language. The underlying message was that even if Macedonian was a separate language, this had nothing to do with Bulgaria itself. The position towards the Macedonian language was based on the same premise as the position towards the Macedonian nation in Yugoslavia: it may be that there was Macedonian language in Yugoslav Macedonia, but this had nothing to do with the Macedonian question in Bulgaria. The BCP did not deny that people in Yugoslav Macedonia spoke Macedonian language. But it also insisted that Bulgarian was the historic language of Macedonia. The biggest concern of communist Bulgaria was that if there was a Macedonian language there, it would open the question of the language in Pirin Macedonia. On this issue the BCP was firm that there was only one Bulgarian language spoken in communist Bulgaria: Bulgarian. Thus the language issue remained a mute point in Bulgarian-Macedonian communist politics. The dispute consisted of several aspects. The starting point was that Bulgarian nationhood has been traditionally connected to language. Language has been an inseparable part of the Bulgarian national identity. From the language point of view the Macedonian question in Bulgaria was not only about the territorial unity of Bulgaria but also about the linguistic integrity of the Bulgarian nation.

The Bulgarian-Macedonian language dispute therefore ran deeper than the purely linguistic debate, which was more or less freely discussed in communist Bulgaria. The

Macedonian language question in Bulgaria was also about: (a) defining language as an exclusive national identification, which led to the denial of the existence of the Macedonian language in Bulgaria, (b) understanding the establishment of the official Macedonian language as an attempt to steal from the national Bulgarian history, and (c) insisting that Bulgarian linguistic unity was untouchable.

The theory about the origins of the Bulgarian language was supposed to be the best evidence of Bulgarian linguistic unity. This theory was closely linked to the myth of the civilising mission of the Bulgarian people. Bulgarian language was upheld as the language of Slav civilisation. Inquiring into the ethnic background of the creators of the Cyrillic alphabet, the brothers St. Cyril and St. Methodius, as well as underlying the antique character of the historic, religious, folk and secular Bulgarian language literature in the Middle Ages and during the Bulgarian Revival, were used as arguments in support of this theory. Communist Bulgaria claimed that the creators of Bulgarian literacy may have been of a Slav background, but nevertheless they were major heroes of Bulgarian nationhood.

On the contrary in Yugoslav Macedonia the same personalities were considered heroes of Macedonian culture, understood as a separate entity. In Yugoslav Macedonia, the Macedonian language was legitimised as a separate one by the formal Macedonian alphabet which was officially accepted in 1945. It was based on the spoken dialects of Bitola and Veles, which were close to the Bulgarian language but as the Bulgarian was based on eastern dialects of the country, there was enough differentiation for the Macedonians to claim that it was a language distinct from Bulgarian.

Yet there were inconsistencies in the Bulgarian communist policy on the Macedonian language question. Under Dimitrov (1944-48) communist Bulgaria officially recognised the Macedonian nation with its own language. The recognition was in accord with the Soviet policy of 'Macedonia for the Macedonians', which lasted until the split between Tito and Stalin in 1948. Once the Soviet policy changed, Bulgarian communists altered their position and bitterly disputed the existence of the Macedonian language. The communist policy towards the Macedonian language had the support of the Bulgarian intellectual elite. Also the majority of the people in Bulgaria believed that there was no separate Macedonian language. The linguistic differences were explained mainly as a Serbian influence imposed on Macedonia.

The argument that the Bulgarian and Macedonian languages were the same encouraged the belief that the people were also the same and of the same nationality. The understanding was that members of a particular ethnic group dress and eat in similar ways and speak the same language. This argument over Bulgarian language unity ignored the fact that Bulgarians and Macedonians were living in different states and under quite different political systems, though within the general framework of the communist ideology. Although in theory Bulgarian communism underlined political consciousness as the essence of socialist Bulgarian identity, in practice identity was defined in cultural terms of history and memory. In Bulgaria the process of building a Macedonian literary language was most often referred to as something negative, dangerous, wrong, unjust and most importantly illegitimate. In contrast, in Macedonia, the language was seen as an inseparable part of Macedonian nationhood. Bulgaria thought of the Macedonian language as an invention, whereas in Macedonia it was perceived as a reconstruction of the Macedonian ethnic core and a national integrative force. Thus the two views

constructed conflicting national histories in both countries, which refused to accept that a common past can be transformed into a separate future.

XV. Conclusion

After 1948 Bulgarian communism offered ethnic Bulgarian identity to everyone in the country, including the people of Pirin Macedonia. This seemed permitted by Soviets and in agreement with the views of the ethnic Bulgarian majority in the country. In relation to the Macedonian question, Bulgarian identity under communism was defined in ethnic terms. Yet at the same time Bulgarian communist identity had to declare loyalty first to the Soviet Union. Some people accepted this formula, but for the majority of Bulgarians it was simply an ideological construct, which had very little to do with real life. The communists' flirtation with the idea of accepting the existence of a separate Macedonian identity in Bulgaria lasted briefly, but officially Yugoslav Macedonia was not denied by the Bulgarian communist state. The conflict between Yugoslavia and the USSR helped Bulgaria find a temporary solution to the Macedonian question. The Macedonian question was restricted to issues of Bulgarian nationalism, in an effort to ignore developments in Macedonia. It was somehow frozen, not forgotten but rather forbidden. There were hardly any newspapers and almost no other printed sources of information from Yugoslav Macedonia available in Bulgaria. Travelling from Bulgaria to Macedonia was highly restricted and heavily controlled by the Bulgarian authorities.

One of the side effects of the communist policy on the Macedonian question was that many people in Pirin Macedonia felt they were being compensated for the lack free choice of their national identity with second hand 'Macedonian' things. For instance the annual folk festival 'Singing Pirin' (*Pirin pee*) as well as the numerous government initiatives to improve life in the region were felt as a deliberate policy for satisfying the population. Yet no material benefits succeeded in keeping some people away from the idea that beyond the border there was 'another' Macedonian life. Thus Macedonian

identity was loaded with mythical attraction - over there, the 'real' Macedonian life as opposed to the one here in Bulgaria. The fear of being punished for identifying as Macedonian in Bulgaria also had an ambivalent impact. Some people felt silenced. But many others became very attached to their own ethnic definition. As Connor argues on the effects of similar policies towards national identity : 'In some cases they threatened people but in others they nurtured the weed they intended to root out.'⁵⁴ However there was no organised Macedonian movement in Bulgaria under communism based on demand for Macedonian identity to be recognised as different from the Bulgarian one. There were individuals only who desired to live in Yugoslav Macedonia as Macedonians. Some Macedonians from Bulgaria could resettle in Yugoslav Macedonia on the basis of family relations. There are no statistics available about them, but it is known that the Bulgarian state issued individual permissions. Another option was to apply for political asylum in Yugoslavia as a member of persecuted ethnic minority in Bulgaria.

The BCP's conduct of the Macedonian question also affected Bulgarian relations with its neighbours. The Soviet anxiety over Yugoslavia was so serious that Bulgaria was permitted to develop some relations with Greece and Turkey, but not with Yugoslavia. In the early 1960s some openings were allowed. In 1962, the Bulgarian communist leader Todor Zhivkov made an official visit in Belgrade and in 1965 Tito was welcomed in Sofia. But these occasions did not amount to a full normalisation of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations. Communist Bulgaria lived in isolation, dictated by the Soviets and confused by its national problems. The Macedonian question was put on hold.

⁵⁴ Connor, The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory, p. 551.

Chapter 5: Muslims Under Bulgarian Communism

Part 1: The Turkish Minority – The Politics of Ethnicity and Power

I. Introduction

On 21 May 1993 deputies of the Bulgarian Parliament tried to shout down Prof. Ibrahim Taturli, MP from the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), the country's Turkish party. They accused him of being hypocritical because he was a former member of the special commission for the 'Revival process' which directed the anti-Turkish renaming campaign in 1989. Now they criticised him for being too emotional in defence of Turkish rights and accused him of attempting to fuel ethnic tensions.

Mr. Taturli provoked the uproar by quoting in Turkish from an old grave inscription found in Bulgaria. The parliamentary audience took this as a provocation because the only official language in the country was Bulgarian.

The MP responded that the Bulgarian deputies could not appreciate his words or position because he had a 'Turkish experience', which did not resonate with the Bulgarian public.

This encounter was one of the many illustrating how was the political debate in Bulgaria was coloured by ethnic issues as a result of communist policy towards the Turkish minority. The core of this was the 'Revival process', the campaign for the forcible changing of the Turkish names in 1984-85 carried out by the communist authorities and the consequent turmoil in the Bulgarian-Turkish interethnic relations in 1989. Afterwards Turkish people identified unanimously with the ethnic persecution directed against

them by the Bulgarian authorities. Their unique 'Turkish experience' during these years gave them a special insight into the nature of the Bulgarian communism.

The biggest effect of the communist policy on the Turkish question in Bulgaria was unintended - the 'Revival process' focused the dissident movement in Bulgaria on human rights issues and the Turkish issue became the most active internal factor during the changes in 1989. It has also led to the emergence for the first time in its history of a new political contestant representing the interests of the largest ethnic minority in the country. This chapter argues that the BCP tried to exercise total control over Christian-Muslim relations in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian communist regime resorted to the use of violence in its attempt to destroy the Turkish community. This policy sharpened the ethnic boundaries of the Turkish community and deepened the Bulgarians' negative stereotyping of Turkishness. Communism widened the gap between the two communities. In his defence the MP Taturli made this point stressing that 'our' hardships - those endured by the Turkish minority - mean very little to 'you', - that is the ethnic Bulgarian majority. Under communist power Bulgarian-Turkish relations existed in a state of ethnic conflict. The Turkish minority, as the single biggest ethnic minority in the country, was defined in opposition to the ethnic Bulgarian majority population. The Turkish population was depicted as the representative of the traditional Bulgarian enemy - the Ottoman empire. Bulgarian Turks were associated strongly with Ottoman dominance in the Balkans in general and in Bulgaria in particular.

This perception was greatly strengthened by the fact that Bulgarian Turks had ethnic kin in neighbouring Turkey, which retained its meaning as their mother country. But modern Turkey was not part of the Soviet bloc - a strong argument in the hands of Bulgarian communist against Turkish minority rights. The perception that part of the population in

communist Bulgaria was related to 'the enemy' of the Bulgarian people was reinforced by the concept that Turkey was also an enemy of communism. During the 1940s and the 1950s communist Bulgaria managed interethnic Bulgarian-Turkish relations according to Leninist ideas about language education for national minorities. The BCP's policy held in Stalinist fashion that the ethnic culture of the Turkish minority was a sign of backwardness, and that although language differences were perfectly acceptable and facilitated by the Bulgarian educational system, religion was not -it was supposed to be erased and substituted by 'socialist consciousness'. But as the idea of ethnically homogenous Bulgarian nation gained ground in the 1960s, the Turkish issue became a heavy burden for the state. If immigration could not solve it, the BCP designed an assimilation programme. Its implementation led to the most destructive experience related to national questions in Bulgaria under communism.

This chapter analyses the ideas behind the Bulgarian communist policy towards the Turkish minority. This policy is of crucial importance for understanding nationalism, ethnicity and power in Bulgarian society under communism. The research discusses the position of the Turkish minority in the context of the development of ideas of the ethnic Bulgarian communist nation-state, and looks at the importance of its specific characteristic as 'formerly dominant minority'. It considers the conduct of ethnic conflict management during communism in relation to the Bulgarian-Turkish interaction.

Generally Bulgarian communism considered ethnic heterogeneity as destabilising. The elimination of ethnic difference was seen as giving stability to the communist regime in Bulgaria. Bulgarian communists understood integration as the elimination of differences and erasing the 'foreign' elements of the Turkish Muslim identity, which was viewed as backward, reactionary and potentially subversive. Gradually the promotion of the idea that Bulgaria was an ethnically homogenous nation led to the denial of the very existence

of the Turkish ethnic minority. This policy culminated in the 'Revival process', the anti-Turkish campaign for the forcible changing of names of 1984-85, leading to the mass exodus of the Bulgarian Turks in 1989.

BCP policy towards the Turkish minority developed from 'benign neglect', and relatively regulated immigration to Turkey before and after the Second World War to a combination of 'hegemonic control' and 'forcible assimilation'.¹ On one hand communist policy led to the biggest ethnic crisis in the new history of Bulgaria. On the other, it presided over the most radical change in the political position of the Turkish minority in the country. The ideas of ethnic nationalism were the main motivation of the Bulgarian communist policy. Ethnic homogeneity was seen not only as a stabilising factor of the political power but also as an unifying force of the Bulgarian nation under communism. The Bulgarian communist regime sought legitimacy in achieving the ethnic homogeneity of the country. Yet the unintended consequence was that the Turkish issue compelled the establishment of the Bulgarian dissident movement in the 1980s by attracting international attention to the human rights issues in the country. Bulgarian opposition focused on the issue of ethnic persecution and organised itself as a human rights pressure group. The support it received from international human rights organisations was invaluable and greatly encouraged the movement for change. At the same time the BCP tried to reform itself fully on ethnic nationalist grounds and succeeded in mobilising the intellectual elite of the country against the Turkish people. This chapter looks at the role of the intellectuals in the communist politics in relation to the Turkish minority issue. It argues that the support of the intellectuals was crucial to the 'Revival process'.

¹ See John McGarry and Brandan O'Leary (eds.), The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation: Case Studies of Protracted Ethnic Conflicts, (London & New York: Routledge, 1995).

II. Historical Background of the Turkish Minority

It is largely accepted that ethnic Turks began to settle in Bulgaria towards the end of the fourteenth century.² The biggest influx of Turks took place under the rule of the Ottoman empire. Nowadays Turkish people live mostly in compact communities in southern Bulgaria (in the Arda river basin), in the north-east in the region of Dobruja and the Deli Orman area (Ludogorie). They also live in scattered communities in the Rhodope mountains and in central and eastern Stara Planina (the Balkan mountains). Ethnic Turks in Bulgaria are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims. Turks are not the only Muslims in Bulgaria. Crampton divides Bulgarian Muslims into four ethnic or linguistic groups. The largest group, which is the main subject of this chapter, is Turks who resettled in Bulgaria after the Ottoman conquest.³ They retained their language and cultural traditions. The second group, also covered by this research, are the Pomaks. They are converts to Islam and in general have retained their native Bulgarian customs and language. The third group are Tatars who came to Bulgarian lands in the mid-nineteenth century from the Caucasus and settled along the Black sea. The fourth group consists of Muslim Roma (Gypsies) who spread all over the country. ⁴

² See Anthonina Zheliazkova, Razprostranenie na isliama v zapadnobulgarskite zemi pod osmanska vlast XV - XVIII vek, (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata Akademia na Naukite, 1990) and Bilal N. Simsir, (ed.), The Turks of Bulgaria in International Fora: Documents, (Ankara: Publications of Turkish Historical Society, 1990), serial VII, No 100, vol.2.

³ For a scholarly speculation about the origins of the Turkish people living in the north-eastern region of Deli Orman in Bulgaria being actually descendants of the ancient Proto-Bulgar Turks who did not assimilated into the Slavic population, see H.T. Norris, Islam in the Balkans: Religion and Society between Europe and the Arab World, (London: Hurst & Company, 1993), p. 147.

⁴ See R. J. Crampton 'The Turks in Bulgaria, 1878-1944' in K.H. Karpat, The Turks of Bulgaria: The History, Culture and Political Fate of a Minority, (Istanbul: The Isis Press,

Muslim settlement in the Balkans was linked to a special category of land ownership in the Ottoman empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: the *mulks* and *vakufs*. The central government was making gifts of land to revive economic life there. This caused an influx of migrating groups of mixed origin, some of them nomadic. Most of them were poor or landless peasants from Anatolia.⁵ The Ottoman lands were administered by the *millet* system, which did not differentiate between ethnic groups. It recognised the cultural autonomy of all Orthodox religious groups living under its rule and their members were all subjects of the Sultan. The Sultan was the absolute ruler, the protector of the political power and the religious leader of the country obliged to promote the holy prescriptions of the Koran. The political-religious community of the Muslims and the other people under the empire's domination was the caliphate, which united the church and the state. This form of government merged civil and political powers and regulated life by religious law. Gellner defined this society as 'trans-ethnic'. By this he meant that Islam as a philosophy fundamentally gave the opportunity for ethnicity to fuse with national identity, 'so that one can hardly tell which one of the two is of most benefit to the other.'⁶ According to Islam, the social order is a given: 'It holds that a set of rules exists, eternal, divinely ordained, and independent of the will of men'.⁷ In essence, before the rise of nationalism in the Balkan parts of the Ottoman empire, national identity meant primarily religious affiliation. But the collapse of the empire, and the transformation of the Islamic *millets* into societies based on national independence, was a dramatic change for all communities.

1990), pp. 43-44.

⁵ See Zheliazkova, Razprostranenie na isliama, 1990.

⁶ See Ernest Gellner, 'The Muslim Society', *Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, vol.32, p. 5.

The new rulers were Christians and this was reflecting in their ideas about social order. In general Christianity was more open to the division of political and religious powers, 'to give into Caesar that which is Caesar's'. In another words, the new national states, which emerged after the collapse of the Ottoman empire, were supposed to bring civil liberties in the spirit of the French Revolution. Yet at the same time, they retained their Oriental character, particularly from western European point of view. This was detectable in the desire to build up a monolithic social order, which could encompass the political and the spiritual. The new national states still had to compete with the old *millet* thinking. In this sense both Muslims and Bulgarians entered the new era of the Bulgarian national independence with similar experience.

The Bulgarian Turks belonged to the community of Balkan Muslims, which is neither homogenous, nor has clear geographical boundaries. What united them was that they formed a minority, which lived in the middle of essentially Christian environment. They were also strongly associated with the former imperial power, the Ottoman empire and Turkey, also a young national state, which became their new mother-country. Thus they reminded Bulgarians of their 'foreign' oppression. Islam was viewed as a hostile to the Eastern Orthodoxy. But in fact what made Bulgarian Muslims quite a specific community was their unconventional Islamic background. They were an overwhelmingly rural population with very little contact with the city. They professed a kind of folk Islam, which was viewed as a rather conservative but also unregulated faith whereas urban Islam was thought to be pure and pious.

⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

Balkan Muslims, including the Bulgarian Turks, have been known for their unorthodox beliefs, called heretical or mystic Islam. Scholars of Islam have shown interest in the Balkan sects and in the intermixing of the elements of Christianity and Islam in the rituals of the 'Dervish', 'Bektashia' or 'Aliani' in Bulgaria.⁸ Their syncretism is thought to be rooted in the active interaction between the folk-Christianity and the folk-Islam which shaped a curious variety of Balkan Islam and adopted many non-Muslim features such as icons and baptism. Such influences could also be observed in the Balkan Muslims local cults, which were interpreted mostly as a reaction to the monotonous scholastic Islam. In this sense Bulgarian Islam communicated with the Christian beliefs, although not in a systematic manner. At the same time, the roots of Bulgarian Christianity are also quite ambiguous. Various medieval heresies played rather important roles in the shaping of the Balkan Christians' faith. The Christian Balkans were riddled by Manichean and non-Manichean (Paulicians) dualist heresies. Most notably Bogomilism, with its dualistic beliefs, is thought to have provided the whole region with the tendency towards heterodoxy that is often blamed for the conversion of Christians to Islam.⁹

There are many controversies surrounding Christian and Muslim heresies. But the main point in relation to Christian-Muslim relations in the Bulgarian lands is that the religious boundaries in the Balkans were quite fuzzy. Indeed from this point of view Bulgaria was on the crossroad between Christianity and Islam. Unconventional faiths on both sides offered bridges for coexistence and possibilities for identities to shift according to historical circumstances. Yet for the Bulgarians, the Greeks, the Serbs, the Macedonians,

⁸ See Machiel Kiel, Studies on the Ottoman architecture on the Balkans: A legacy in Stone, Collected Studies Series CS326; 1. Balkan Countries. Ottoman Architecture, History (Great Britain: Variorum, 1990).

⁹ See Norris, Islam in the Balkans, 1993..

and the Romanians, Muslim minorities remained above all associated with Islam as a colonising force, which came from the alien Arab East. The conversions under foreign rule retained the meaning of being forcible and undesired. Later on religion was reflected in the political views of both Christians and Muslims. The Eastern Orthodoxy underlines the importance of the community above the individual. This is also the case with traditional Islam. Eastern Orthodoxy downplays the education of the church establishment and highlights the power of belief; Islam sees hierarchical order as designed by itself and does not have real clergy.

These peculiarities of both religions are connected to the understanding of change, which both communities see as undesired. The still and inwardly orientated perspective Balkan Christians and Muslims share derives from their understanding of the finality of the absolute. When translated in political terms, this means to a great extent that people live in a community ruled by divine powers and individuals have little responsibility as to how the community life should be organised. This world view is often referred to as Balkan or Eastern European 'Orientalism' as opposed to the Western Christian world associated with individualism and social dynamics. In Islam, religious and the civic powers merge. But there is also a corresponding Christian concept, namely the idea of *Caesaropapism*, a political system in which the head of the state also has the power of the church, which is mostly associated with the Byzantine understanding of Christianity. Although this concept is not explicitly stated in Eastern Orthodoxy, historically it has been very close to the political powers. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church, founded in 1870, marked the beginning of the Bulgarian national liberation movement, which resulted in state independence. Orthodoxy became the symbol of the Bulgarian nation and has been considered an inseparable part of Bulgarian national consciousness.

Thus the main similarity between Islam and Orthodoxy is the lack of division of powers and the blurring of the political and the spiritual. From the religious point of view the two communities were different of course, but also similar. What divided them was the political interpretations of the difference, the politics of nationalism, not their religious affiliation as such.

III. Turks and Bulgarian National Independence

Bulgarian independence in 1878 dramatically changed the country's political elite. The position of Christians and Muslims was reversed. The Christians, previously governed by the Ottoman *millet*, became a majority in the new Bulgarian state, and the formerly dominant Muslims evolved into a minority within it. The new Bulgarian state institutions were created reflecting these new roles. Accordingly the Bulgarians became the legitimate holders of military power, previously forbidden to them by the Ottomans. Turkish people had to rely not only on the new state to make space for them, but also to organise themselves in a different way. The community was shattered by the dismantling of the old order and was not ready for the new one.

The new Bulgarian law addressed the issue of Turkish minority rights. The 1878 Treaty of Berlin included provisions for freedom of worship. The Turkey-Bulgarian Convention of 1909 and the Turnovo Constitution of 1879 gave some guarantees for the rights of the Muslims.¹⁰ The Regional Assembly of Eastern Rumelia envisioned representation of the non-Bulgarian religious communities, although the Turks did not succeed in winning seats. Officially language provisions stated that any of the three major languages of the province could be used to in the Regional Assembly - Bulgarian, Greek or Turkish - but in reality Bulgarian was established as the official language. Underlining these new realities the new rulers also made some symbolic changes by converting some mosques into churches. Certain place names were changed from Turkish into Bulgarian. Yet the Turkish issue was not on the immediate agenda of the new Bulgarian rulers. The division of the country, at the Berlin Congress of 1878, the consequent Balkan wars and the First

¹⁰ See Articles 40 and 41 from Turnovskata Konstitutsia, (Sofia: FTP, Seriya Documenti i Facti), p.10.

World War put forward the Macedonian question, which enormously troubled the Bulgarian political life. During this time Turkish people came in contact with the Bulgarian government mostly when they needed assistance to emigrate to Turkey.

Bulgarian Turks did not struggle for their rights. They preferred to live undisturbed by the modernising processes, which were transforming the entire structure of social life. They also showed neither a desire to integrate into Bulgarian society, nor to oppose it. This social and political passivity was the beginning of their marginalisation in independent Bulgaria. Turkish presence was most visibly affected by Bulgarian rule when the names of the villages were massively changed in 1934 by the Damian Velchev-Kimon Georgiev government, which came to power after a *coup d'état*. The administrative reforms it carried Bulgarised the names of two-thirds of all Turkish place names.¹¹

¹¹ See Petur Koledarov and Nikolai Michev, Promeni v imenata i statuta na selistata v Bulgaria: 1872-1972, (Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1973).

IV. Bulgarian Turks and Turkey

After Bulgarian independence the Bulgarian Turks continued to communicate with their kin in Turkey. In fact by having very minimal contact with Bulgarian society, the Turkish community preserved its unity and strong association with their mother-country. Turkey made numerous gestures by accepting the Bulgarian Turks through a number of immigration agreements with Bulgaria. Several distinct periods of Muslim emigration could be discerned according to the historical and structural changes of the independent Bulgarian state. The first one is the period of 1877-78 and its immediate aftermath. The immigration was a direct consequence of the success of the Bulgarian national liberation. The second period was from the mid 1880s until the arrival of the communists in power in 1944, when Turks were barely involved in political and the social institutions. Despite Turkish support in the Bulgarian war against Serbia of 1885, Bulgarians remained suspicious of the Turks loyalty to the Bulgarian state. The third was the regulated emigration waves according to different agreements between communist Bulgaria and Turkey. The fourth started with the mass exodus in 1989 and continues in smaller numbers to this day. During these periods, Turkey's position towards Bulgarian Turks kept changing. In general it was dictated by Turkey's defence of the rights of the Turkish minorities abroad.

But what kind of a mother-country could Turkey be for the Bulgarian Turks? The modern Turkish state became a successor of the former imperial power in the Balkans, the Ottoman empire, which ruled the country for nearly five centuries. Understandably this complicated the relations between the two countries and reflected strongly on the attitudes towards the Turks in Bulgaria. They were often perceived both as a members of the 'formerly dominant' class and as a potentially destabilising factor in the internal

politics of Bulgaria. Thus modern Turkey, which the Bulgarian Turks had as their mother country, was seen in Bulgaria as a threatening neighbour. The main complication for the identity of the Bulgarian Turks in relation to their mother country was that the mere idea of Turkish nationality was a very new one. It was born out of the dissolution of the Ottoman empire. Similarly to Bulgaria, Turkey also emerged as a modern state after the collapse of the empire. Both countries saw nationalism as a consolidating force of the political movement for the construction of national identities. Turkish nationalism, similarly to the Bulgarian and other Balkan nationalisms, brought major changes in the region.

Strictly speaking the Bulgarian Turks were Ottoman subjects of Muslim faith, who after the collapse of the empire were supposed to identify with both the Bulgarian and the Turkish nation. After Bulgarian independence, the Turkish people who stayed had to transform their Ottoman, supra-national identity, into a national one. But they could not really develop as Bulgarian nationals because the idea was to build a Bulgarian one-nation-state. Neither could they keep up with the construction of the new Turkish national ideas in Turkey. As a result Bulgarian Turks fell largely outside the nation-formation processes in both Bulgaria and Turkey. They remained connected but also disconnected and somehow 'in-between' these two countries. The new nation-states, Bulgaria and Turkey, offered them very little choice in this respect. In Bulgaria they were repeatedly encouraged to leave whereas once in Turkey the pressure was to assimilate into a very new Turkish style of life. As Crampton argues, 'the Kemalist revolution meant that Turkey itself was now employing the modernising, secularising policies, which had so offended many Bulgarian Turks in the post-liberation years; this did not however deter many Turks from leaving Bulgaria for a new life in their neighbouring nation-

state'.¹²The notion that Turkey had an agenda towards the Turkish minorities living outside its borders added to the Bulgarian Turks' anxieties. ¹³ Bulgarian Turks were aware of the uncertainties of their future but did almost nothing to protect themselves. The future was to bring many more challenges than they ever expected.

¹² See Crampton, 'The Turks in Bulgaria' in Karpas, The Turks of Bulgaria, p. 71.

¹³ The Bulgarian communist and post-communist politicians and intellectuals make particular reference to the Cyprus problem, which became acute in the 1970s and remains unsolved to this day.

V. Bulgarian Turks under Communism

The Turkish community was not part of the political debate in Bulgaria during the Second World War. Rather Bulgarian Turks rather continued their life on the margins of the Bulgarian society. The arrival of communism in Bulgaria after the end of the war dramatically changed this state of affairs. Most importantly communism demanded response and accountability from all citizens of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. Although one could be an insignificant member of the new communist society, it was hardly possible to remain outside it. This meant that Bulgarian Turks could hardly sustain their political passivity. Under communism everyone had a duty to participate in the building of a perfect society. Minorities issues were openly part of the immediate communist agenda in Bulgaria after the end of the Second World War. But what made the Turkish community very different from the rest of the ethnic Bulgarian minorities was its size. Turks were the largest minority in the country. Even if the results of the censuses carried out in communist Bulgaria in 1965 and 1975 adjusted the numbers in order to undermine it, it was largely acknowledged that Turks always made up about 10 percent of the Bulgarian population after 1944.¹⁴

Until 1984 when the forcible assimilation campaign took place, the ethnic Turks were recognised officially as a 'national minority' in communist Bulgaria, along with other

¹⁴ According to the data in the report submitted to the Politburo of the Central Committee of BCP defining the approximate size of the main minorities in 1989, there were 844,000 Turks living in Bulgaria. The results of the last census conducted in 1992 estimated 800,000 Turks in the country.

minorities including Roma, Jews, Armenians but excluding Macedonians and Pomaks.¹⁵ However this recognition was not without reservations about the very idea of the existence of national minorities in Bulgaria. The first Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria of 4 December 1947 stated: 'National minorities have a right to be educated in their vernacular, and to develop their vernacular, and to develop their national culture.' The 1971 Constitution marked a shift towards the marginalisation of the minorities' status. It made no specific reference to ethnic minorities in Bulgaria and spoke about 'citizens of non-Bulgarian origins'.¹⁶ In 1975 the section recording nationality was removed from the personal identity cards of all Bulgarian citizens. In 1984 the passports of the renamed Turks were changed and issued with their Bulgarian names and in 1990 the new law allowed the change to be reversed according to the new politics towards the Turkish minority.

Similarly to its approach to the Macedonian question, the BCP could not design a consistent policy towards the Turkish issue and its approach kept changing. But whereas the policy towards the Macedonian question was conducted mainly according to the changes of the Soviet-Yugoslav relations, in the case of the Bulgarian Turks, it was directed mostly from within the BCP. The Turkish issue was considered an internal matter, whereas the Macedonian question involved sensitivities concerning the relations between the socialist states. Of course the fact that the mother-country Turkey was in the 'enemy's bloc', a member of NATO and a state with long history of hostile relations with Russia and the Soviet Union, continued to shape the policy towards the Turkish

¹⁵ The Pomaks or the Bulgarian Mohameds are from Slav origins. They speak Bulgarian as their mother tongue but are of Islamic faith and are largely believed to have converted to Islam during Ottoman times.

minority. It was much easier to sever dialogue with Turkey on the grounds of leading an ideological battle against the capitalist world than to explain a disruption of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations. Yet the BCP policy towards the Turkish minority was not dependent on international affairs and relations between Sofia and Ankara. The driving force behind the communist approach was the way the Bulgarian communist establishment saw the Turkish presence within the country. This in turn revealed the nature of communist power in relation to ethnicity in Bulgaria.

Initially, on the level of rhetoric ethnic-conflict management under Bulgarian communism sought full integration of the national minorities into the Bulgarian communist nation. The theory was that socialist citizens could be of any nationality. In practice those who were not Bulgarian were encouraged to leave the country. In 1949, the head of the communist party, Vulko Chervenkov, introduced severe Sovietisation into Bulgarian economic and social life. He was a determined Stalinist, who saw minorities' issues as a problem to be solved as soon as possible. Under his rule, the Bulgarian government tried to settle the Turkish question by negotiating their mass resettlement. Bulgaria and Turkey reached agreement over their emigration and by 1950 the authorities received about 250,000 applications for emigration. As a result, between 1949 and 1951, the largest number of those who applied were able to leave. The Turkish government complained that it could not accept such a huge mass of people at once and that among those crossing the border there were Gypsies. Consequently it introduced a strict entry-visa regime and closed the border. It also claimed that Bulgarian officials forged documents for the Turks to enable them to leave.¹⁷ Turks also left because of

¹⁶ See Veselin Metodiev and Luchezar Stoinaov (eds.), Bulgarski Konstitutsii i Konstitutsionni Proekti, (Sofia: D-r Petur Beron, 1990).

¹⁷ See Hugh Poulton, The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict, (London: Minority

pressure exerted on them to collectivise the land. As most of them were engaged in the agricultural production, this had an enormous effect on their life. Collectivisation programs put them in a particularly unfavourable position and they chose to leave the country.

During the 1950s communist propaganda described the Turkish minority as an equal participant in the building of a glorious socialist state. Turkish achievements were underlined in contrast to the discrimination they experienced under the monarch-fascist regime of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie.¹⁸ Most importantly, during this period, Bulgarian Turks were still recognised as a an ethnic group living in Bulgaria. Although the idea clearly was to let as many as possible to move to Turkey, those who chose to stay were acknowledged as a presence in the Bulgarian life. During the 1960s reforms in Bulgaria failed and the country entered a new period of stagnation. This reflected directly on the position of the Turkish minority. The negotiated mass resettlement of Turks under Bulgarian communism soon came to an end. In 1968 there was another agreement, which allowed the departure of relatives, who had left previously. This was the last

Rights Publications, 1991), p. 119.

¹⁸ Official publications described the participation of the Turks and other minorities in the partisan struggle as a starting point in their socialist integration. See The Turkish Minority in the People's Republic of Bulgaria, 1951. This pamphlet was essentially an essay on the emigration of the Bulgarian Turks. It asserted that Turkish emigration was not involuntary as suggested by the Turkish government. Additionally it claimed that the Bulgarian Turks were not at all encouraged to leave Bulgaria. In the typical Stalinist style of the time Turkish accusations of the Bulgarian mistreatment of the Turkish minority were described as an expression of the British-American imperialist's designs against the Soviet system and Bulgaria itself. It reversed the accusations by asserting that it was the Turkish government who manipulated national and religious feelings of the Turks and then created obstacles on their way to Turkey.

resettlement agreement; it expired in 1978. During the 1970s information about the Turkish immigration became scarce and gradually the issue stopped being discussed. In 1973 the Turkish foreign minister visited Bulgaria and discussed the issue of repatriation again. Turkey was concerned that too many people wanted to leave and the government slowed down the issuing of visas, arguing that they were still better off in Bulgaria.¹⁹

Yet this policy was not clearly articulated. The Bulgarian approach was either to move the Muslim population, or to cover up the problem, hoping that it would fade away. At the same time the communist authorities paraded the ideological aspects of the Turkish issue. They proclaimed that it was about the confrontation between capitalist imperialism and just communism. Turks who stayed should be grateful to Bulgaria; those who left ought to be forgotten.

¹⁹ See Hugh Poulton, The Balkans, 1991, and Ali Eminov, Turkish and Other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria, (London: Hurst & Company as Book Series No. 6 of the Institute of Muslim Minorities Affairs, 1997).

VI. Turkish Education Under Bulgarian Communism

During the 1950s Turks in Bulgaria had a separate education in Turkish language. The main condition attached to it was that it had to have socialist content. During this Stalinist period, which was the most constraining period of the Bulgarian intellectual development, Turkish education reached its highest point. The Sovietisation of the educational system promoted education in minorities' languages. The Soviet ideas were based on their experience with the Muslim and Turkic speaking people in Central Asia. They were copied in Bulgaria with little idea of long-term development. But gradually the idea of a separate Turkish education was transformed into a merging with Bulgarian schooling. At the end of the 1960s Turkish language schools were combined with Bulgarian schools and by the early 1970s teaching Turkish ceased to exist altogether.

The main consequence of this uneven policy was that the Turkish minority was prevented of creating its own educated class. Initially Turkish education was about educating Turks in communism in Turkish language. Later on it was about assimilating them into the Bulgarian culture through education in Bulgarian language. The Department of Turkish Philology at the University of Sofia was admitting a considerable number of ethnic Turks from a politically sound background. This seeming educational integration meant actually recruiting the more educated members of the community into the security services, which observed them strictly once they were in the university system. In effect the party controlled the Turkish elite and the professional development of its community members. Moreover the Faculty of Turkish Philology admitted exclusively 'reliable' Bulgarians, who were also placed under the stringent control of the security services. In this way the state controlled fully the Turkish elite, which was anyway quite small. Thus education under Bulgarian communism facilitated the 'co-

optation' of the Turkish intelligentsia in Lustick's terms.²⁰ There was an additional pressure on those who were trusted to be party members to register regularly their loyalty to the Bulgarian state, which meant devotion to the communist party. Turks were constantly criticised for lacking sufficient 'socialist consciousness'. In fact the BCP expressed general concern about the 'political correctness' of the whole community; it was very often disparaged as backward. Ethnic Bulgarians were still considered regular members of the socialist society, even if they were not communist party members, whereas a Turk, even when a party member, remained a reactionary element. On average the highest post that a Turkish communist could obtain was District Party Committee chairman. In the 1970s there was one Turkish member of the higher structures of the BCP, the Central Committee, and he had a Bulgarian name, Kalin Kalinov.²¹

Despite the great efforts to re-educate the Turks, Turkish language remained a major problem for the communist authorities. Although it was used exclusively inside the community, it continued to be the native language of the Bulgarian Turks. It defined the ethnic boundaries, and most importantly, as Kymlicka asserts, when maintaining the minority language implies disloyalty, the society becomes ethnically divided.²² The Faculty of Turkish philology was closed in 1974 and replaced by a department of Eastern (Arabic) Languages. After that the Turkish department reopened irregularly. The majority of the students in these departments were children of the Bulgarian diplomatic staff working in the Arabic countries. In general those who studied Turkish were officially or unofficially either serving as 'informers' or expected to do so after graduation. This

²⁰ See Ian Lustick, Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority, (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1980).

²¹ See RFE, Bulgarian SR/5, 27 May 1986.

²² See Will Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights,

situation continued until the late 1980s and reached its highest point through the close collaboration between the security services and the experts in Turkish language and Ottoman culture during the assimilation campaign of 1984-85.

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 97.

VII. Demographic Concerns and the 'Revival Process'

Bulgarian Turks traditionally maintained more closed family structures compared to ethnic Bulgarians. Living in social isolation generally strengthens familial allegiances. Kymlica observes that when a minority is not integrated into the mainstream life, the family becomes the social refuge from a hostile and alien 'other' society.²³ Communism encouraged Turkish marginalisation without realising that it may strengthen the ethnic consciousness of the community. The only organised form of Turkish life was the community with its ethnic ties: common language, religion and family bonds. This exposed the Bulgarian Turks as different from the majority and made them a vulnerable community. But they lived dispersed in the cultural and geographical margins of the communist state. Somehow Turkish ethnic identity was accepted as a matter of fact by the Bulgarian population. Yet the BCP decided that there was something wrong about having Turks in Bulgaria. It was very concerned about the demographic development of the nation. The message was that Bulgarian people had to expand as a socialist nation and a high birth rate was to be one of the many achievements of communism.²⁴ But the demographic growth of the Turkish population was regarded as a major threat to the future of the Bulgarian nation. The problem was how to deal with the ethnic minorities' demographic development. In theory they were also part of the socialist nation, as long as they were being loyal to the Bulgarian political state. Accordingly they should have been also encouraged to increase their number. During the late 1960s, a special state policy was introduced in order to encourage the growth of the birth rates. The state

²³ Ibid., p. 103.

²⁴ The BCP's demographic policy never acquired the dimensions which communist Romania did under Nicolae Ceausescu. Nevertheless in both countries the idea that successful nations must expand demographically as much as possible was fundamental to

provided various child and family benefits and imposed some restrictions on abortion for married women. It was applied indiscriminately towards everyone, including the Turkish community. At the same time the Turks lived predominantly in the countryside and couldn't get extra flats on the basis of having an extended family, which was the most desired award; the cash benefits were not that generous. But many ordinary Bulgarians viewed that it was wrong for the ethnic minorities to enjoy the same benefits. It was generally felt that these were too many, Turks and in particular Roma and their numbers needed not to be expanded.²⁵ The BCP designed this policy deliberately to encourage the enlargement of the ethnic Bulgarians. But it could not direct it towards the ethnic Bulgarians only because there was no way to make the distinction without bridging the law in a very obvious manner. Yet the policy was inspired by the fear that Bulgarians would be outnumbered by Turks. This contradiction created a strong insecurity about Bulgarian demography.

Bulgarian communism could not escape the traditional 'fear of extinction' characteristic of many Eastern European people.²⁶ This worked in combination with communists' search for new legitimacy in nationalism and led to the eruption of ethnic violence during the 1980s. The demographic policy increased the general concern and was seen as one of the reasons to carry out the 'Revival process'. Eminov suggests that at that time the demographic issue was particularly sensitive because of the then forthcoming census, communist politics of nationalism.

²⁵ See Eminov, Turkish and other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria, 1997.

²⁶ For full definition of the term in the context of the political traditions of Eastern Europe see George Schöpflin, Politics in Eastern Europe: 1945-1992, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 5-38. In the Bulgarian case the 'fear of extinction' is reflected in the myth of the long suffering of the Bulgarian nation according to which the Ottomans aimed to destroy the Bulgarian people.

which might have registered a higher number of ethnic Turks than the BCP thought was acceptable.²⁷

²⁷ See Eminov, Turkish and other Muslim Minorities, p. 95.

VIII. The Background of the 'Revival process' (1984-85)

The failure to reform the BCP during the 1960s, the consequent political stagnation, which in the 1970s embraced all aspects of life in Bulgaria, as well as the economic decline, exposed Bulgarian communism as an incapable regime. Soviet style internationalism continued to be the official ideology of Bulgarian socialism, but after the events in Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and in Poland in 1981, it was widely discredited. Communism everywhere in Eastern Europe was in question. Although communism in Bulgaria was not damaged in the same obvious manner as in Poland or Hungary, by the 1980s it was in a deep crisis. The legitimacy of the communist regime was hard to maintain and it was strongly felt that the future would hardly bring the full implementation of the communist promise. Moreover Bulgarian communism had very little to offer as an alternative. National sensitivities were sharpened. With the Bulgarian cultural nationalism unsatisfied and the ethnic groups facing discrimination. It seemed that Bulgaria lost everything under communism, including its national pride. Yet whereas to blame the Soviet Union seemed inappropriate for the Bulgarian public and absolutely inconceivable for the BCP, activating the internal national questions still seemed in the hands of the Bulgarian communist rulers. How did exactly the BCP came to the decision to organise the 'Revival process' and what triggered it remains unclear. No party statement or any other written document has been uncovered until today, which can adequately explain the way party's decision was taken. However the facts about the manner in which the campaign was carried have been established quite clearly. Interpreting them in the context of the communist party policy, the intellectual environment and the general state of mind in Bulgaria during the 1980s, tells the story of the 'Revival process'.

Essentially the 'Revival process' mobilised public opinion and polarised Bulgarian politics on the ethnic issues. The old and powerful myth of the long suffering of the Bulgarian nation under the Ottoman rule, which communism enhanced systematically, was brought into political life and charged with new energy. It was used to legitimise the use of violence against the ethnic Turks in Bulgaria. Later the 'Revival process' was facilitated by the marginalised position of the Turkish minority. Turks were badly informed in general about political developments in Bulgaria and abroad and were not politically organised. The majority of them relied mainly on the goodwill of the Bulgarian communist masters and did not understand their real importance for the ideas of Bulgarian ethnic nationalism. The lack of independent media in communist Bulgaria was a major factor for the success of the campaign. So were the realities of the Cold War, when the international community outside the Soviet block could do very little to stop the ethnic violence in Bulgaria. Also essential for the campaign was the support of the Bulgarian communist military leadership and the Bulgarian intellectuals.

In late 1984 Bulgarian authorities initiated a massive campaign to forcibly change the names of all ethnic Turks. The Bulgarian authorities stated officially that ethnic Turks were descendants of Slav Bulgarians who were forcibly converted to Islam under Ottoman rule. It was declared that they voluntarily and spontaneously wanted their Bulgarian names back as a symbolic 'rebirth' of their Bulgarian nationality. The whole process was named 'The Revival process' (*Vuzroditelen proces*), which was an allusion to the Bulgarian Renaissance during the late 18th century (*Vuzrazhdane*). The BCP orchestrated and controlled the campaign. The message was very clear - the national questions were going to be dealt with actively and the party rhetoric was to be turned into 'deeds'. In effect the BCP officially declared that Bulgaria was to be transformed into a homogenous ethnic nation-state. It also signalled that in this respect the BCP

could handle matters alone, which was supposed to compensate for the lack of independence from Moscow. At a time when the communist regime in Bulgaria was facing maximum insecurity, it would play the nationalist card to win maximum support.

IX. Changing the Names

The main purpose of the campaign was to replace the names of ethnic Turks with Bulgarian ones. But the 'Revival process' was also about eliminating all signs of Turkishness in the country. Apart from involving the change of personal names, the names of the dead forefathers, on gravestones, in public office records, reference books, literature were to be erased. Bulgarian communism had decided to eradicate the ethnic, the cultural and the historic evidence of Turkish life in Bulgaria. In practice using Turkish names was forbidden and fines were introduced for speaking Turkish language in public places or on the phone. There was also a new burial ritual imposed by the state on Muslims and there was a complete ban on the circumcision of infants. Circumcision was made punishable by law and there were checks on the new-born baby boys. With the new regulations an official from the local government or a militiaman had to accompany any Turkish burial to ensure that it was carried out in a 'civilian' manner. Turkish cemeteries were closed down and many were desecrated.²⁸

During the campaign the policy of the Bulgarian government to co-opt the Turkish elite intensified. The Muslim clergy was targeted. All Turkish officials were summoned for instruction on how to help the campaign as well as to report back on the results. The security services put pressure on many ethnic Bulgarians who were in touch with Turkish people to report on them.²⁹ Mosques were divided into two categories: official, ones

²⁸ See Bulgaria: Imprisonment of Ethnic Turks: Human Rights Abuses During the Forced Assimilation of the Ethnic Turkish Minority, (London: Amnesty International, 1986).

²⁹ Bulgarian students, who studied at the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Sofia at that time, recalled in conversations with me how they were approached by the

which had a government- appointed leader and non-official ones, which did not. The latter were closed and some were destroyed. Many mosques were damaged by abusive inscriptions. Some of the closed mosques were turned into museums and had the sign 'Museum of Bulgarian Muslims' on the locked doors. The half-crescent which is normally on the top of the minaret was removed because it was associated with Turkish national symbols. In March 1985 'The Muslim Leaders' Letter on Religious Freedom' was officially released. It declared that opposite to the Western sources of information and the Ankara summoning of the ambassadors of the Islamic countries the Bulgarian government gives all the freedom for religious expression and cares about the Islamic monuments. It argues that Islam is a world religion and 'each Muslim is entitled to his or her nation's name.' It was signed by the Chief Mufti and the regional *mufties* of seven big towns who all had Bulgarian names. The main purpose of the declaration was to object the Turkish foreign ministry that no foreign institution has the right to be the 'spokesman for Islam'.³⁰

But how was the 'Revival process' met by the Turkish people? The campaign seems to have come as a surprise for the majority of the Turkish people in Bulgaria. Some of them hoped that the campaign would bypass them; others tried to escape or hide. There were some attempts to organise peaceful protests but most were crushed at the beginning. Very importantly the Bulgarian police managed to crush perhaps the most important form of Turkish political resistance at the very start. Ahmed Dogan, a Turkish Marxist

security services and asked to submit any information they had about Turkish people they knew.

³⁰ RFE, SWB EE/7894/B/1, 8 March 1985.

intellectual based in Sofia, was imprisoned in 1986 for anti-government activity.³¹

Another form of Turkish protest was organised terrorist activities. Although they were rather sporadic and relatively harmless, the occurrence of any actions of this type was extremely worrisome for the Bulgarian communist authorities. In 1986 there was a series of bombings at the station in Plovdiv, the airport in Varna, Sliven and Kazanluk. The Turkish embassy in Sofia was guarded tightly to prevent any gathering of demonstrations or Turks entering with complaints or asking for political asylum. The private mail of the majority of Turkish people was strictly checked and in some cases the security services asked for private letters written in Turkish to be translated into Bulgarian.³² Most of the ethnic Turks detained during the campaign were imprisoned in Belene, the notorious prison camp on an island in the Danube where during the 1950s a large number of political prisoners were held.³³ The use of the labour camp and the internal banishment, as well as the official language used during the campaign, showed that the communist government policy was reverting to the methods and the rhetoric of the 1950s.

³¹ After the changes in 1989 Ahmed Dogan claimed publicly that he run an illegal organisation of 220 members who gathered information for Amnesty International, BBC, Radio Free Europe (RFE), the US Congress. However the organisation's activities were sporadic and information about them began to appear in the foreign media only in 1985.

³² Stefan Andreev. Interview. Sofia: 1996. Andreev is a reputable Ottoman scholar and a deputy director of the Bulgarian National Library 'Cyril and Methodius', Sofia. He told me that the translation of private Turkish correspondence became a profitable business for Bulgarians who knew Turkish during the campaign and afterwards.

³³ See Hugh Poulton, The Balkans, 1991. He estimated that in the early 1985 there were detained between 500 and 1000 Turkish prisoners in connection with the campaign. There were no trials and many of them were released after several months; afterwards some of them were exiled internally. Many times they were charged with 'hooliganism', a term popular during Stalinism. Yet others were tried for 'anti-state agitation' or 'anti-state espionage'.

After 1985 the publication of the Turkish language paper '*Nova Svetlina*' (*Yeni Asik*) became available in Bulgarian language only. Its editor in chief was invited to speak about the Turkish issue at the party congress in 1986. The idea was to show that the 'Revival process' was a voluntary action of the Turkish people, who themselves wanted to 'revert' to their Bulgarian identity. The national media reported that many Turks, of the so called 'new Bulgarians', spoke about their approval of the re-naming campaign. But in a number of cases the identity of these allegedly Turkish representatives could not be established.³⁴ Even if the co-optation of the Turkish elite had been quite successful during the previous years, at that moment, very few Turks were prepared to co-operate with the BCP on anti-Turkish grounds. On the contrary the campaign sharpened ethnic awareness as it became increasingly clear that Turks were treated differently from any Bulgarian.

At the same time several public figures, ethnic Turks, escaped to Turkey and gave evidence about the campaign in Bulgaria. The former member of the Bulgarian National Assembly Halil Ibishev, among other things, said that Grisha Filipov, a high ranking Bulgarian party official, warned him in advance that there was going to be a renaming campaign, but that it was aimed at changing the names of Turkish women married to Bulgarian men. He also claimed that the same official told him, that the orders came from the leader of the country, Todor Zhivkov himself. Ibishev did not speculate about possible Soviet complicity in the campaign and suggested that it had been launched

³⁴ See RFE, SR/5, 27 May 1986. There was the case of Stoyan Metodiev allegedly from Haskovo who was also named Bonev on the national radio. Also the previous name of Angel Nikolov, a Pomak awarded as 'Hero of the Socialist Labour' could not be traced.

because of fear of the rapid growth of the Turkish population.³⁵ Another well known Bulgarian Turk who escaped was the Turkish weight-lifting champion Naim Suleimanoglu. He also made his way to Turkey and at a press conference spoke openly about the maltreatment of the Turkish minority in the country. These reports were complemented by Amnesty International reports about the abuse of human rights in Bulgaria, which were officially denied by the head of the Bulgarian radio.³⁶ The Bulgarian authorities had little space to manoeuvre. They chose to deny all accusations concerning the abuse of human rights in the country led by the belief that the problem with the 'Revival process' would somehow fade away.

Meanwhile the eyes of the Bulgarian Turks as well as of the international community were turned to Turkey. In January 1985 the Turkish President, Kenan Evren, delivered the first of four protest notes, calling for the Bulgarian authorities to end the campaign and to reach a new emigration agreement. Bulgarian officials replied that there were no Turks in Bulgaria and that there would be no negotiations with Turkey and no emigration.³⁷ The rest of the Islamic world also expressed serious concern about the Bulgarian Turks. In 1987 the Organisation of Islamic Countries sent delegation to visit Bulgaria and as a result, the UN special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance for the Human Rights Committee named Bulgaria as one of seven countries systematically preventing the peaceful practice of religion.

He spoke about the 'Bulgarian national socialist consciousness' and said that the Turks were profoundly convinced of their 'ancestral Bulgarian roots'.

³⁵ See RFE, SR/8, 9 September 1986.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

³⁷ RFE, SR /5, 28 March 1985.

The combination of economic and administrative sanctions, the threats and the control of the media was effective as far as the majority of the Turkish people assumed their new names and the Bulgarian community remained largely passive. But the changing of the names strengthened the ethnic consciousness of the Turkish community and by no means helped their assimilation as were the communist intentions. Despite the seeming lack of action and feeling that no one from the outside world could do anything, the international awareness of the violation of the rights of the Bulgarian Turks increased. Turkey was very cautious, but also quite persistent.

X. Bulgarian and Turkish Dissent in the Aftermath of the 'Revival process'

The 'Revival process' relied heavily on the intellectual background of the campaign to legitimise it. The regime was confident that the Bulgarian national media would support it. Most of the people who worked in the national media were of strictly 'politically correct' background and many of them were members of the party themselves. The vetting procedures for recruiting staff for television, radio and national newspapers were very strict. This assured the smooth running of the party propaganda machine in general and in times of crisis in particular. As a result Bulgarian media were severely censored and controlled and the intelligentsia was mobilised to defend the nation against foreign subversive elements. After the campaign was over in 1985 the recruitment of informers for the security services among the Bulgarian intelligentsia intensified. The secret services were particularly interested in people with education in humanities, who were involved in research, held public posts and were connected in any way to questions of nationality in Bulgaria.³⁸

The campaign aimed to legitimise the ethnic violence by implementing it within the existing legal framework. The authorities did not issue any written orders for changing names; the resistance to the campaign was not reported; the use of violence was not admitted. Since the army's activities were considered state secrets, its involvement in the violence that accompanied the campaign was legally unquestionable. There was no

³⁸ Members of intellectual institutions such as the Institute of Balkan Studies and the Institute of the History of the Bulgarian Literature at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences shared with me how they were approached by the security services with offers to work for them on the Turkish issue and promised to be rewarded. Interviews. Sofia, 1996.

official legal ban on religious practice either. The regime tried to say that what was going on with the Turks was lawful.

In order to deal with the concerns expressed inside and outside Bulgaria about the treatment of the Turks the BCP made an attempt to build up its own human rights profile. Thus when in 1988 six Bulgarian dissidents set up the Independent Association for the Defence of Human Rights in Bulgaria, the authorities responded by registering officially an organisation named the Human Rights Committee, chaired by Konstantin Telalov, a former ambassador to the UN and a high-ranking party figure. The BCP resorted to creating a parallel structure to the dissident one. This signalled that the emergence of alternative political life in Bulgaria so worried the regime that it was not enough simply to repress it. It was more important to delegitimise it by setting up a government organisation with the same function. This also ensured that regarding human rights issues, foreign officials and journalists had to contact the official sources first.

During the period of 1988-89, within a matter of six months Turks outnumbered Bulgarians in the Independent Association. This was the first dissident organisation in Bulgaria under communism. It was genuinely interested in the Turkish issue. It also understood that Bulgaria's violation of international agreements was a way to attract outside attention to communist Bulgaria. In late 1988 a specifically Turkish civil rights group within Bulgaria was formed. The Democratic League for the Defence of the Human Rights aimed to oppose the assimilation campaign and the repression of Islam. It applied for official registration and was refused.

At the same time the authorities tried to counter these activities organising campaigns of visits and speeches. The prime minister and Politburo member Grisha Filipov visited Kurdjali and other towns where Turks lived compactly. He called for the transformation of the region into 'a fortress of the Bulgarian spirit' and prosperity. The newspaper published in Blagoevgrad, *Pirinsko Delo*, reported that Dimitur Stanishev, a member of the Central Committee, visited the city and announced that 'there is not a single section of the Bulgarian people that belongs to another nation'.³⁹ Dimitar Stoianov, the Interior minister and Politburo member, spoke about the change of names as an action objectively serving the cause of peace and good neighbourliness in the region and in Europe, because it created better conditions for building and developing Bulgarian relations with Turkey on a 'consequently sound and clear basis.'⁴⁰

The BCP continued to insist that the rule of law was in place and that communism was the only desired regime in Bulgaria. But the widespread belief was that the politics of the country were highly ethnicised, that the old order was shaking, and that the regime was losing ground. Nobody quite knew what would the future bring, but in the spring of 1989 the smell of change was in the air.

³⁹ See RFE, SR /5, 12 May 1985.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

XI. 'The Exodus' of the Bulgarian Turks

At the beginning of May 1989 hunger strikes accompanied by demonstrations started in the Turkish regions. By mid June more followed and the authorities responded with violence. The situation became explosive and the BCP policy changed dramatically. All those Turks who disagreed with the Bulgarian policy of assimilation were officially permitted to emigrate. In May 1989, Todor Zhivkov himself addressed the nation on television and appealed to the Turkish government to open the border and let go those who want to go to Turkey to remain there. On the 2 June his speech was published in *Narodna Kultura*, the newspaper largely read by the Bulgarian intelligentsia. In his speech the Bulgarian leader underlined the achievements of the socialist revolution, which pulled the Muslim population out of the dark ages of backwardness, that Bulgaria is a society in the period of restructuring (*perestroika*) in all spheres of life, and that in respect of all international conventions every citizen has the right to travel. He called Turkey's policy anti-Bulgarian and finally and most importantly stated that Turkey should open her border for the Bulgarian Turks. Zhivkov relied on appealing to the traditional Bulgarian national sentiment of being the long suffering nation, which never lost its pride: 'The Bulgarian people will not fall on its knees ... every citizen will support the oneness of the Bulgarian people.' ⁴¹

Thousands of the Bulgarian Turks started the journey to Turkey, which became known as 'the big excursion'. By August 1989 about 300,000 left the country. The authorities declared that they were leaving voluntary because they were disloyal and ungrateful for what Bulgaria had done for them. Yet the truth was that the authorities put pressure on many Turks to leave. Some were given notices of 24 hours, others were invited

unofficially to leave.⁴² This was accompanied by organised anti-Turkish demonstrations in major towns in the Turkish regions and other centres, including the capital, Sofia. At the same time many institutions were asked to send telegrams in support of Zhivkov's speech; schools and colleges were summoned to demonstrate. The idea was to counter the Turkish demonstrations. It was supposed to be a spontaneous manifestation of national unity. In fact it was an organised ethnic confrontation orchestrated by the state leadership. These mass rallies became the most effective tool of extracting popular support. It had been a long time since Bulgarians had had the chance to demonstrate 'against' and not 'in support of', as it always was under communism. For the first time they were given the chance to march on the streets with nationalist slogans, such as 'Bulgaria for the Bulgarians' and 'Death to the Enemy'. To use Kertzer's term, 'the politics of carnival' expressed the feelings of national solidarity: 'The rites with which people cope with crises and conflict are not just products of a political elite, whether conservative or revolutionary. On the contrary, one of the most important aspects of such rites is that they provide a means for the powerless to take power, for the people lacking any formal means of political control to have a political influence. Through rites the powerless can overcome their politically debilitating isolation, their lack of bureaucratic organisation, and be united to challenge the position of the elite.'⁴³ The marches symbolised the readiness for mobilisation based on national unity, which the communists used for their own purposes.

⁴¹ See Todor Zhivkov, 'Speech', *Narodna Kultura*, 2 June, 1989.

⁴² In 1996 I interviewed members of Turkish family in Sofia and Novi Pazar, who returned from Turkey. According to them the Bulgarian authorities gave them a very short notice to leave although they were not willing to go.

⁴³ David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 144.

The demonstrations against the Turks were supplemented with sponsored cultural events such as the release of the film '*Vreme Razdelno*' (Time to Divide) based on the popular novel by Anton Donchev. It was a popular melodrama about the forcible Islamisation of the Bulgarians under Ottoman rule.⁴⁴ Many Bulgarians identified with the symbolic images of the oppression of the Bulgarian nation and responded very emotionally. It is with a background of such ritualised and publicised Bulgarian national sentiments that the Turkish exodus took place.

⁴⁴ See Anton Donchev, Vreme razdelno: istoricheski roman, (Sofia: Bulgarski Pisatel, 1964).

XII. The Intellectuals' Response to the 'Revival Process'

The idea behind the communist policy towards the Turkish question was to eliminate ethnic difference in Bulgaria. As suggested earlier, the anti-Turkish campaign could not be legitimised without the intellectual support of the Bulgarian elite. The regime had to justify the policy of forcible assimilation, and the only way to do this was to design a concept on the Bulgarian national question which could convince public opinion and satisfy the ideological requirements of the communist party. The theory had to match the practice, not the other way around. The call was to re-work Bulgarian national history in order to justify the communist policy. The Bulgarian communist historiography had to answer the question - why do the Turks have to change their names now? The answer was given by the communist party, and the historians had to conceptualise it. What made the task possible was the fact that there were many intellectuals who believed that the communist policy was in principle correct. The Turks were actually ethnic Bulgarians who were forced to convert to Islam under the Ottoman rule. They were misled and now was the time to correct the mistakes of the past. But the leading factor in this process was the idea of communist Bulgaria as a homogenous nation-state. Intellectuals were employed in the main institutions engaged in the 'Revival process': the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAN), the universities and the media. Among the most important contributors to the construction of the theory of the Bulgarian ethnic background of the Turks were Angel Balevski (chairman of BAN), Professor Hristo Hristov (historian), Strashimir Dimitrov (historian), Orlin Zagorov (historian, previously named Shukri Tahirov), Professor Petar Petrov (historian), Professor Ilcho Dimitrov (historian). Leading Bulgarian experts in the field of Ottoman Studies were also mobilised to support the theory with historical evidence the theory, including more open minded historians of the Ottoman period, such as Elena Grozdanova, Tzvetana Georgieva, Evgeni Radushev,

Stefan Andreev.⁴⁵ Historians' involvement was of primary importance because it was history itself which had to be presented as the reason for the campaign. 'Correcting' the ethnic identity of the Turks had to be explained as a question of historical truth, which had to be uncovered. For example Hristov wrote: 'A Bulgarian may be an Eastern Orthodox, a Catholic, a Muslim or a Protestant but he is nonetheless Bulgarian...It is precisely the Ottoman oppressors' desire to couple religious with ethnic assimilation from the very outset that provides the basis for the present day Turkish fabrications about some large Turkish population in the Bulgarian lands.'⁴⁶ The head of the Centre for Eastern Languages and Cultures at the University of Sofia, Emil Boev wrote that Islam was a religion only, whereas Bulgaria was a nation. He argued that there was one Bulgarian identity and that the 'Revival process' was about a question of 'the ethnocultural unity of the Bulgarian people'.⁴⁷

Balevski placed the emphasis on the Bulgarian people being a victim of ethnic persecution: 'No other people has gone through such an annihilation with the exception of the American Indians and the Armenians perhaps.'⁴⁸

This kind of intellectualising of the 'Revival process' had two main aims: to legitimise the campaign itself and to legitimise the shift of the BCP policy from political nationalism towards ethnic nationalism. This move was not entirely new but was promoted gradually from the 1960s onwards. But it was the first time in the history of the BCP when its position on the identity of the Bulgarian people had to be defined and declared against other people living in Bulgaria. Yet again it continued to try to square ethnic nationalism

⁴⁵ See Stranitsi ot Bulgarskata Istoria: Ocherk za Islamiziranite Bulgari, (Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1989).

⁴⁶ *Zemedelsko Zname*, 19 April, 1989.

⁴⁷ *Studentska Tribuna* (Special Edition), 6 July, 1989.

within Marxist-Leninist theory by claiming that all Bulgarian citizens have socialist identity and there were no ethnic differences within the country. The Bulgarian opposition used the claim that Bulgaria was a lawful communist country to ask why it was then promoting a policy which was against its constitution. In 1989 few intellectuals expressed public objections to the campaign. They were mainly university lecturers (in humanities), writers or members of the technological intelligentsia and were not formally organised. Among them were Mihail Nedelchev, Alexander Iordanov, Blaga Dimitrova, Petar Manolov, Elka Konstantinova, Andrei Sheludko, Solomon Passy.⁴⁹ Some of them were among the founding members of the Club in Support of the Perestroika and Glasnost. They were neither united or very articulate in their opposition to the 'Revival process'. Mostly they claimed that the campaign was being carried out in an undemocratic manner because it breached the law on freedom of speech and religious expression. Others were not really sure that the policy was altogether wrong. They implied that in principal the campaign was not fully unjustified. For instance Petko Simeonov, a prominent political scientist, whose name was associated with somewhat alternative Marxist thinking in Bulgaria, criticised the lack of freedom of speech in the country, but also said Bulgarians are threatened by the Turkish presence in the country. He commented: 'I think that the Levsky republic can be build by patriots, regardless of

⁴⁸ *Rabotnichesko Delo*, 7 September, 1989.

⁴⁹ These people did not acted in an organised manner but rather shared similar views on the topic and engaged in conversations about what could be done. The most extraordinary act of protest at the time was the exhibition organised by Solomon Passy in 1986. Passy was a mathematician at the Institute of Mathematics at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, who started writing on mathematical topics under the Turkish pen-name Suleiman Osmanoglu. He exhibited his own amateur etchings under the same name in a private Sofia flat and the event was attended by more than 100 people, most of whom belonged to intelligentsia circles. This was meant to be a sign of protest against the re-naming campaign.

their background, it can not be done with foreigners...In all Balkan countries there are now as there were in the near past identical processes with the restoration of the names...One ought to have been born in Bulgaria, Greece, Yugoslavia, Armenia, Cyprus to comprehend the meaning of slogans about dealing with the 'giaur'...'50

The debate about the Turkish question was blurred by politicised definitions of ethnicity and nationalism under communism. Even those most determined to oppose communist policy found it very hard to make a clear and convincing argument. As far as ordinary people's views, they were shaped to a great extent by the economic consequences of the Turkish exodus, as the Bulgarian economy declined. 'Peacetime mobilisation' was announced in July 1989 for extra working hours and voluntary brigades in agriculture. This filled working-class people with resentment, because they had to work 'instead and because of the Turks'. The declared mobilisation also created certain enthusiasm in the party *nomenklatura* in the countryside. Lower level district party officials had the chance to be active in mobilising the population for the fulfilment of the economic plans with the special mission of 'saving the Bulgarian country and nation'. The local press restored the 1940s and 1950s rhetoric of the glamorous socialist achievements: 'An outburst of determination has taken over the agricultural sector...The cattlemen are showing their exemplary patriotism...The mobilisation is full!'51 For the first time since the sharp disillusionment with the socialist economy in the 1960s, the countryside was called to unite in the name of defending the nation, but not as before the name of the future and

⁵⁰ Petko Simeonov. Interview. BBC World Service, Bulgarian Section, 26 May 1989. '*Giaur*' is the word used by the Ottomans to name Christian non-believers. It has derogatory connotation.

⁵¹ *Silistrenska Tribuna*, 13 May 1989.

complete triumph of communism. Now the imperative was to unite against a 'foreign enemy'.

XIII. The Party, the 'Revival process' and the Soviet Position

Bulgarian communist policy towards the Turkish minority appears not to have been directed or approved by the Soviets. Did the BCP consult at all with the Soviets over it? Similarly to the Macedonian question, which was considered part of the complicated Soviet-Yugoslav relations, and to the Jewish issue, which remained connected to Soviet politics in the Middle East, the Turkish minority in Bulgaria was connected to Turkey's relations to the Soviet Union. From the Soviet point of view, the Bulgarian policy could have disturbed Turkey-related issues in Central Asia, but it was a rather vague and distant connection at that moment. More immediately *'perestroika and glasnost'* was preparing the ground for a big change in the Soviet policy towards Eastern Europe. The BCP failed to recognise this and launched the anti-Turkish campaign without realising that this time 'the big brother' might not get involved in Bulgarian politics, neither in the role of governor, or as defender. In fact the Soviet leadership avoided any direct comment on the exodus. The foreign minister, Edward Shevarnadze, cancelled his visit to Turkey due in June 1989, most probably because he wanted to avoid the issue. In general it was also thought that Todor Zhivkov's relationship with Mikhail Gorbachov was far less friendly than with the previous Soviet leaders, Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev in particular. Gorbachov visited Bulgaria only once in 1985 and commented afterwards that there were few sharp disagreements between them. In June 1989 Zhivkov met with Gorbachev in Moscow, in the midst of the Turkish crisis, it seemed that the two leaders agreed to support the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of other states. Yet it is hard to imagine that Gorbachov would have supported a re-naming campaign of ethnic minorities, since the Soviet leader was openly speaking at the time about minority rights as part of human rights issues in the new communism he thought the Soviet communist party could build. Moreover the Islamic communities in Central

Asia had a different history under communism, and despite of the Russification policy of the Soviets, Muslims there lived within a federal structure, enjoyed much more independence, and the relationship with 'the centre' was contracted rather than dictated.

⁵² The Soviet press publicised the Turkish issue in a limited manner, when the exodus was in motion, but it restrained from criticism, and to some extent justified the Bulgarian policy, in the face of what it saw as possible Turkish intervention and taking into account the Cyprus scenario.⁵³ There was no longer a single opinion in Moscow - '*glasnost*' was well on its way and what Soviet newspapers wrote did not have to be solely what Gorbachov believed in. It would have been hard not to discuss the Turkish crisis in Bulgaria. But perhaps in view of what happened later on in Eastern Europe, Gorbachov may have considered Zhivkov as a retiring politician. Gorbachov was a new type of western orientated leader, whereas Zhivkov always maintained the image of the unsophisticated communist, leader of the common people. Although Bulgaria was the most loyal Soviet satellite, it was also in the backyard of the imperial provinces.

The situation in the rest of the socialist countries was similar. On the whole the Eastern block distanced itself from Bulgaria but avoided open criticism. In fact none of the communist world opposed the campaign, but none approved either. Hungary and Poland kept quiet on the issue, although during a visit to Turkey in June 1989 the Hungarian president Bruno Straub said, that it was 'an inescapable element of European cooperation to realise minority rights and respect for human rights.'⁵⁴ Romania was totally isolated under Ceausescu's rule and had its own national problems to deal with;

⁵² See Richard Pipes, Russia under the Bolshevik Regime, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

⁵³ See 'Shest vekov i dva mesetsa', *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, No 31. 2 August, 1989.

⁵⁴ RFE, SR, 7 August 1989.

Albania was completely cut off and at the time seemed irrelevant to Eastern Europe. In general Yugoslavia was always eager to point to Bulgaria's bad record on minority rights, due to the complicated relations with Bulgaria over Macedonia. But on the other hand since 1980 it was facing serious problems with the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia and had no interest in commenting on the Turkish issues in Bulgaria. In fact since the troubles in Kosovo erupted in 1981, the Macedonian authorities started revising their policy towards the Albanians in a similar fashion. Cuts were made in the educational system in terms of teaching in Albanian language, textbooks were re-examined on suspicions of nationalist content, frequent arrests were made on the grounds of nationalism and irredentism. It was reported that in Skopje the editor-in-chief of the Albanian language service broadcast listened to the entire record library of the Albanian popular folk songs only to find out that about one third of them had nationalistic or national-romantic content. Also in the 1980s certain names were forbidden to be given to the newly born children of the 'nationalist inspired Albanian parents' in Macedonia.⁵⁵ After the renaming campaign in Bulgaria a team of musicologists was given the task of extracting the parts of a traditional Turkish instrument (*zurla*) from Bulgarian folk songs. This was only one of many changes that had to be made in the national heritage as a result of the anti-Turkish campaign.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See Hugh Poulton, Who are the Macedonians?, (London: Hurst & Company, 1995).

⁵⁶ Evgeni Radushev. Personal conversation. London, 1994.

XIV. Turkey's Reaction

The only active relationship between Bulgaria and the outside world in relation to the Turkish exodus remained with Turkey. Bulgarian Turks had no significant links with Muslim organisations in the rest of the Balkans or Eastern Europe. The size of the exodus made Turkey's involvement inevitable. The Turkish government recognised the huge refugee problem by mid-June 1989. Ankara first posed the question: if there were no Turks in Bulgaria, who were the Bulgarian authorities deporting now? The Turkish leader Turgut Opal went personally to meet the first Turks, who were expelled and were arriving in Turkey via Belgrade. Later on he visited refugee camps around the Bulgarian-Turkish border. The Turkish president, Kenan Evren, said that a great human tragedy was taking place in Bulgaria and called on all civilised countries to oppose what he called the oppression of the Turkish minority there.⁵⁷ At the same time Turkey seemed incapable of dealing with the crisis. The border was closed in August 1989 and Turkey admitted that it could not take any more of the refugees. Ozal stated publicly that Turkey treated the matter as a humanitarian crisis and that it would not affect commercial or economic affairs or diplomatic relations with Bulgaria. There were additional complications, which seemed to have affected Turkey's attitude. Ankara's efforts to present a joint European community response to Bulgaria's action were delayed by Greece, Turkish old rival with Turkish minority of its own; the Cyprus issue was quite sensitive and relevant. Additionally Turkey's record on human rights issues made her motivation for intervention in Bulgarian politics questionable. In fact some observers criticised Ozal and suggested that the Bulgarian crisis gave him an opportunity to improve his diminishing popularity and divert attention from domestic problems. Others thought that the Bulgarian-Turkish issue served to strengthen Turkish nationalism. Ozal

himself said: 'the West gets excited over human rights in Turkey when Europeans are involved, but doesn't give a damn when Turks are the victims.'⁵⁸ These factors could not prevent Turkey from expressing compassion for the plight of the Turkish people in Bulgaria. But it did make it difficult to make a strong argument against the Bulgarian policy. As a result Turkey's policy remained contradictory. Turkey preferred to shift the issue from a purely ethnic minority question to a violation of individual human rights. The idea was to maintain that the issue was not a bilateral matter between Turkey and Bulgaria, but a question of Bulgarian democracy and the stand the international community should take in relation to the state of Bulgarian communist institutions and the lack of respect for human rights in the country. Public opinion in Turkey supported of the government's position that the persecuted may have to be accepted in Turkey, but that there should be a new emigration treaty to regulate such a big resettlement.

For a long time after the 'Revival process' began the countries in the Islamic world showed no signs of any diplomatic activities regarding the issue. One month after the exodus started the Islamic Conference Organisation (ICO) issued a joint statement and totally condemned Bulgaria for the treatment of ethnic Turks. The organisation urged all its members to impose economic, political and moral pressure on Bulgaria. Iran, Iraq, Algeria and Libya were seen as very important partners of communist Bulgaria, but their criticism was not viewed as damaging by the Bulgarian authorities at this time. The main reason was because a great deal of the Bulgarian arms trade directed to Iran and Iraq had already diminished due to the end of fighting between the two countries.

⁵⁷ See BBC Monitoring Service. Report. 14 May 1989.

⁵⁸ *The Economist*, 17 June, 1989.

The key countries were Turkey and the Soviet Union, and for different reasons both were not as active so as to prevent the biggest forced resettlement of Turks in Bulgarian history.

XV. The CSCE and International Responses

The most important attention given to the issue in the West was at the Conference on Human Rights of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), held in Paris 30 May 1989.⁵⁹ This was a unique opportunity both for the first big international breakthrough on the Turkish question and for the Bulgarian opposition to voice its concerns. Before that, in January 1989 the Association for the Support of Vienna 1989 was founded by Bulgarian Turks, who had been expelled. Its name was intended to attract the international attention to the plight of the ethnic Turks in Bulgaria exactly at the time of the CSCE conference in late May 1989. The conference was attended by an official Bulgarian delegation, which included several independent intellectuals from the Club for the Support of Glasnost and *perestroika*, most notably the widely respected and politically active writer Blaga Dimitrova. Representatives of two émigré groups, the US-based Free Bulgarian Center and the French-based Dialogue Foundation to Support the Democratic Process in Bulgaria also attended the Conference. One high point of the conference was a press-conference addressed by seven Turkish representatives of the Association, including the human rights activist Ismet Emrullahoglu, who showed scars on his legs from maltreatment before being expelled. The Turkish delegates also asked to speak in Turkish. This put the Bulgarian delegation in an embarrassing position, making it impossible to continue to insist that there were no Turks in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian governmental officials walked out of the press-conference, turning the incident into a media event.

⁵⁹ The CSCE culminated in the signing on Aug. 1, 1975, of the Helsinki Accords, in which the American- and Soviet-led alliances (NATO and the Warsaw Pact, respectively) recognised the inviolability of the post Second World War frontiers in Europe and committed themselves to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

At the same time the independent Bulgarian delegates distanced themselves from the Bulgarian government position. This was a huge step towards recognising internationally that there was dissent in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian émigré's appeared to be acting in co-operation with Bulgarian dissident and Turkish organisations in Bulgaria. This unique alliance showed that the ethnic issue deeply shook the entire political life in Bulgaria and was getting out of control. At the Paris conference the core of the emerging Bulgarian opposition crystallised, consisting of democratically minded supporters of Soviet *perestroika*, Bulgarian émigrés and politically organised ethnic Turks. After the conference the US-state department refused to receive the Bulgarian deputy minister of foreign economic relations and the US Senate condemned the treatment of ethnic Turks. Many European governments condemned Bulgaria's assimilation policy and the Council of Europe issued a joint statement on 15 June 1989. Towards the end of June, the Secretary General of the UN Javier Perez de Cuellar, summoned the Bulgarian ambassador in the UN for discussion after expressing concern over the matter.

XVI. Conclusion

The 'Revival process' organised by the BCP produced unintended results. Its original aim was to make Bulgaria an ethnically homogenous nation by eliminating Turkish ethnicity. This was to be achieved by forcible assimilation. But the nature of Turkish resistance was unexpected. The communist authorities were quite efficient in using violence in persecuting those individuals who resisted changing their names. Sending them to labour camps or to internment made the campaign look successful, because all Turks acquired Bulgarian names. The BCP hoped to be able to manage the whole affair by fear. It also relied on Turkish passivity, which by and large had characterised Turkish political behaviour until the campaign and during its immediate aftermath. What the Bulgarian communists did not understand was that other people's ethnicity could be as powerful as their own. Blinded by their pursuit of power, the Bulgarian communist regime was determined to legitimise its rule through the ideology of ethnic nationalism. But because of their inability actually to inquire into what does ethnicity mean they had little understanding how ethnic identity actually works in politics. The 'Revival process' was the clearest example of how the Bulgarian communist elite used ethnic nationalism for political purposes. The most damaging evidence to which violent nationalism could go, the 'Revival process' scarred the Bulgarian-Turkish interethnic relations for a very long time. The main unintended consequence of the re-naming campaign was to sharpen the ethnic boundaries of the Turkish community. Even though it was hardly possible to be simply a socialist citizen, after the campaign being Turkish meant being persecuted by Bulgarian communism on ethnic grounds. Consequently this raised the political awareness of the Turkish minority, which came to realise that steps had to be taken to defend itself. Living in the margins was no longer a viable survival strategy.

The 'Revival process' also unexpectedly facilitated the Bulgarian opposition by focussing its protests on human rights issues. Although human rights violations were already at the core of Bulgarian dissent, they were understood mainly as environmental issues and the right to free speech. The abuse of human rights during the re-naming campaign was very clear and much more focussed on the core nature of the communist regime in Bulgaria. Amnesty International publicised information which seemed more credible than the conflicting reports about the pollution in Russe, which was the focus of the Bulgarian dissident movement in 1987-88. Bulgarian communism was condemned for the first time according to international law as a political system.

At the beginning of the Turkish exodus Bulgarian authorities seemed to be achieving their aim, which was to rid of the country of Turks, having failed to assimilate them. But with the rapid and dramatic developments elsewhere in Eastern Europe in the autumn of 1989 and the fall of Todor Zhivkov, it became clear that this was not to be the end of the Turks in Bulgaria. On the contrary, not only did Turks returned in substantial numbers, but they were also now determined to participate in the new political life in Bulgaria. A new Turkish political organisation, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) was founded and became a major power player in the country. It is very doubtful that its influence could have been achieved if the history of the late 1980s in Bulgaria had been different. Ethnic persecution consolidated the Bulgarian Turks and gave them a clear political profile, and a new goal, which was to hold power themselves. This task took them far from the image of a helpless ethnic minority, which lived at the mercy of Bulgarian communism. At the same time, the exodus of 1898 created a Bulgarian Turkish community in Turkey, with its own identity and ambitions. In effect, opposite to what the BCP had intended, Turkey's presence in Bulgaria increased. Bulgaria's Turks invigorated the communication between the two countries, which despite of being

problematic has since been accepted as unavoidable.⁶¹ The 'Revival process' mobilised a major part of the Bulgarian intellectual life by reviving the old myth of Bulgarian suffering and redemption. It seemed that Bulgaria was once again at the doorstep of a major process of rethinking its own past in relation to the history of the entire region. The dynamics of this mobilisation proved that the traditional perceptions of Bulgaria have not changed that much despite the years of communism. Bulgarian intellectuals continued to feel strongly about the faith of the Bulgarian ethnic nation and saw ethnic difference as unfavourable to the country's future development. The 'Revival process' underlined the importance of religion and language in understanding ethnic identity in Bulgaria. The fact that Bulgarian attitudes towards the Turkish minority could be manipulated and politicised to such an extent, as proved by the anti-Turkish demonstrations in 1989, was indicative of the strength of national sensitivities. Yet in some ways discussing them seemed better than trying to pretend they were not there. For the debate on nationalism opened new ways of looking at the past. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, a new generation of historians and social scientists emerged offering new readings of the national questions. The 'Revival process' presented them with the dilemma of either serving the security services by reporting on their colleagues and distorting their own research, or being marginalised if not directly persecuted. After the fall of communism in 1989 academics entered the discussion on the Christian-Muslim relations in Bulgaria and pleaded for the de-politicising of the issue. They represented democratically minded expertise and insisted that the cultural differences between Bulgarian and Turks were reconcilable by focusing on their common features. For example the Bulgarian expert in Ottoman history Georgieva stated: 'The system of

⁶¹ For a detailed account of the life of the Bulgarian Turks living in Turkey see Antonina Tzeliaskova (ed.), Between Adaptation and Nostalgia: The Bulgarian Turks in Turkey, (Sofia: International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, 1998).

coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria ... is a *compatibility* model of opposites, in which people of different faith and different ethnic origin participate...'.⁶¹ Such an attitude was a breakthrough in the interethnic relations and it changed the intellectual debate in the country.

The entire policy towards the Turkish minority and the 'Revival process' as its culmination revealed how Bulgarian communism viewed Turkish identity in Bulgaria. Similarly to its views on Macedonian and Jewish identities, the BCP thought that Turkish identity should be changed, whereas Bulgarian ethnic identity should remain fixed. It aspired to prove that the only ethnic identity worth maintaining was Bulgarian. The BCP asked the intelligentsia to submit evidence in support of the authentic Bulgarianness of the Turkish population and to verify that the Turkish presence was a result of unjust and forcible Islamisation conducted by the Ottomans.

During the entire period of communism in Bulgaria, being Turkish retained the meaning of being part of the oppressive past, backward, reactionary and incompatible with the strivings of Bulgarian political nationalism. Its anticommunist colouring was supplemented by Turkey's belonging to the capitalist bloc. In another words being Turkish meant disloyalty to everything Bulgarian. At the same time the specific cultural and historical background of the Bulgarian Turks determined their marginal significance in the eyes of their 'kin' in Turkey. Turkey did not see them as a repository of 'pure' or

⁶¹ Tzvetana Georgieva, 'Compatibility and Incompatibility in the Everyday Life Between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria' in Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria: Draft report, (Sofia: International Center for Minority studies and Intercultural Relations' Foundation, 1994), p.128.

‘unpolluted’ Turkish culture, as often is the case with outside minorities, but rather as an obsolete and obscure reminder of the bygone days of the Ottoman empire.

In general Turks in Bulgaria could not accommodate themselves to Bulgarian modernity as the Bulgarian Jews did. They were badly affected by the collectivisation of the land and had a very small urban elite. Their professional options were minimal and controlled by the state. They were excluded from decision-making and party politics as well as from the military structure and the police force. The Bulgarian attitude towards the Turkish people had its own complexity. It reflected the memory of the unfavourable Ottoman times and shared the prevailing ‘fear of extinction’ of Eastern European societies. The demographic growth of the Muslim population in Bulgaria was seen as threatening to the survival of the ethnic Bulgarians. The very weak tradition of inclusive civil society structures and the highly politicised history contributed to the Bulgarian national anxiety. The feeling of uniqueness mingled with the notion of being victimised by the history itself and divided by the Great Powers’ geopolitical interests. As Kiel comments on communist Bulgaria’s treatment of the Turkish people, the reasons behind the totally ‘black’ depiction of the Ottoman period were understandable but based on rather incorrect claims: ‘It serves the political justification for the position of the country as it is today, and the moral justification of the present policy towards the Turkish minority’.⁶² The last census conducted after the collapse of the communist system in December 1992 caused considerable controversy. The Bulgarian nationalists objected to the ethnic Turks demand - supported by the then government - to include questions on ethnicity, native

⁶² Machiel Kiel, Art and Society of Bulgaria in the Turkish Period: A Sketch of the Economic, Juridical and Artistic Preconditions of Bulgarian Post-Byzantine Art and its Place in the Development of the art of the Christian Balkans, 1360/70-1700. A New Interpretation, (The Netherlands, Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1985), p. 53.

language and religion. The census's polemics reflected the importance of the issue both for the majority and the minority because of the political implications of the size of the population. As Anderson observes, a census is a powerful tool that enables the state to classify its citizens into national categories and then use the classification to determine the strength of the national minority according to its size.⁶³ The smaller the minority is in official numbers, the less visible it will be in state and society institutions.

The Turkish presence in Bulgaria is a record of an ethnic minority's effort to achieve political visibility in order to defend its culture and participate in the society. The difficulties of its acceptance by the Bulgarian side reflect mainly the fear of legitimising the multi-ethnicity of the country which may lead to demands for Turkish cultural autonomy and to a major political and cultural change, though such aspirations were never a living part of Turkish life in Bulgaria. In the transitional period after the end of communism, the leadership of the Bulgarian Turkish community developed political sophistication and an expertise in international human rights conventions and demanded Turkish language education and media. Like their Bulgarian fellow-countrymen the Turks realised that society will be undergoing fundamental changes and they engaged in political struggle for control of this fundamental change. This political empowerment of the Turkish community in Bulgaria was exactly the opposite of what the BCP and its policy towards the minority, had intended.

⁶³ See Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (Rev. ed.), (London & New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 164-70.

Chapter 5 Muslims Under Bulgarian Communism

Part 2: The 'Betrayal' of the Bulgarian Pomaks

I. Introduction

In 1979 Malina Tomova, a poet and literary editor wrote the script proposal for the film entitled Flame, Flame, Little Spark (Gori, Gori, Malko Ogunche).¹ The Bulgarian Arts Council rejected the proposal, although in private many intellectuals praised it highly. In 1982 the council reviewed its assessment and this time granted its approval. But production was blocked again because of the high politicisation of the national question in 1984-85, when the communist regime pursued the renaming campaign against the Turkish minority in Bulgaria.

'Flame, Flame, Little Spark' treats the renaming campaign carried by the communist government against the Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims) in the 1960s. The main character is a young Bulgarian woman who teaches in a remote village in the Rhodopi mountains and witnesses the violent disruption of Pomak community life under pressure of the government's policy for the homogenisation of Bulgarian society. The film tries to negotiate the understanding of 'otherness' and to explore the implications of religious intolerance under totalitarian rule. It also rethinks citizens' responsibilities under communism by sketching out the Bulgarian participation in the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

After the collapse of communism in 1989 the Arts Council authorised the script. In 1993 it received a grant from the National Film Centre and supplementary funding from the Open Society Fund (Soros

¹ *Gori, Gori, Malko Ogunche*, Bulgarian film, 1994, Rumiana Petkova, director; Malina Tomova, script; Svetla Ganeva, camera; Atonina Zheliazkova, consultant.

Foundation), Sofia. In September 1994 the film was shown for the first time at the annual International Cinema Festival in Varna, Bulgaria, and received the an important award. Then it was adapted for television, in four parts, and a broadcast schedule was set. However the National Television postponed the screening because it coincided with pre-election time in post-communist Bulgaria.

Channel 1 of the National Television showed the first part of the film in 1995. But the press criticised the film for presenting a 'false reality', accusing the authors of 'national betrayal' and denying that the renaming campaign against the Bulgarian Muslims was forcible, as the film suggested.

After the second part aired, the National Television announced that the third instalment would be shown only if the filmmakers could defend themselves in the face of the increasingly sharp polemic. Yet script writer Tomova was prevented from taking part in the programme specifically designed to discuss the film. She was also not permitted to attend a press conference about the film although her journalist accreditation was valid. The members of the film team received threatening calls and letters, and the door of Tomova apartment in Sofia was daubed with swastikas, crosses and red stars.

Meanwhile the Bulgarian president, Zhelev Zhelev, attended a special meeting with the intelligentsia on censorship and sharply criticised the government of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (former communists) for imposing political control on the national media, including in case of 'Flame, Flame, Little Spark'. At the same time the press reported that the Commission for National Security had appealed to the Constitutional Court to sue the filmmakers for 'national betrayal'. Apparently the charge was dropped, on the grounds that the film is fiction, not a documentary.

The national media continued to vilify the film by special reports aiming to deny the existence of a distinct Pomak identity and affirming the Bulgarian nationality of the villagers depicted in the film. The Arts Council remained silent and the editor-in-chief of the First Program of the National Radio was ordered not to cover the debate. A high-ranking military representative used aggressive sexist language on the

radio against the female team, but the women's organisations did not interfere in the debate. Unofficially the headmasters of the secondary schools received an order from the Minister for Education to criticise the movie during lessons in Bulgarian history.

Fame, Flame, Little Spark had entered the controversial debate about Bulgarian communism and nationalism and the role of the ruling elite and the nationalist organisations. Zhan Videnov, then-prime minister of post-communist Bulgaria, commented on the radio that the film was harmful to the country.

Having failed to censor the film itself, the national media distorted the context and prejudiced viewers against its message. The one-sided debate turned into a politicised argument about national identities and sharpened ethnic sensitivities. Later Tomova recalled that Bulgarian intellectuals did not want to be associated with her or 'her Pomaks', who seemed to be a symbol of 'national apostasy' (rodootstupnichestvo).²

As a community of Muslims, the fate of the Bulgarian Pomaks under communism was closely linked to developments concerning the Turkish minority. Numbering around 250,000, they represent a small but politically extremely awkward group for Bulgaria. In Bulgaria it is largely believed that the Bulgarian Pomaks are people of Bulgarian ethnic background, who converted to Islam during Ottoman rule. The main evidence used in support of this belief - that essentially Pomaks are ethnic Bulgarians - is linguistic.

Bulgarian Pomaks speak Bulgarian language, though with dialectal characteristics. Most Bulgarian scholars define the specific characteristics of Pomak speech as archaic

² Malina Tomova. Interview, Sofia, 1997.

Bulgarian constructions.³ This claim has been contested by Greek and Turkish scholars who claim that Pomak speech contains many Greek and Turkish words and therefore its origins should be traced to the respective cultures. From here derives the belief that Pomaks may be of Greek or Turkish ethnic origins.⁴

The name *Pomak* has a negative connotation, as it is thought to derive from the Bulgarian meaning of the verb 'help' (*pomagam*), which has been interpreted also as meaning 'collaborating', which indicates the Pomaks position in the Ottoman empire. Pomaks are also called 'Bulgarian Mohameds' (*bulgaromohamedani*), meant to describe their identity as ethnic Bulgarians first and as Muslims second.⁵ However both terms, 'Pomak' and 'Bulgarian-Mohameds' have been viewed as derogatory by many Pomaks themselves. They call themselves Bulgarians, Turks, Ottomans, Muslims, Uruks, Pomaks, or Ahrians, depending on the political circumstances.⁶ Pomaks tend to dislike the hyphenated name, arguing that if it is to be used, Bulgarians should be called Bulgarian-Christians.⁷

³ See Rodopski Sbornik, vol.1-4, 1976. In the late 1950s a special commission was established to study the history, culture and customs of the Pomaks living in the Rodhopi mountains. The results were published in this publication.

⁴ See Ali Eminov, Turkish and other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria, (London: Hurst & Company as Book Series No. 6 of the Institute of Muslim Minorities Affairs, 1997), pp.102- 103.

⁵ See Borianna Panaiotova and Kalina Bozeva, 'Religioznata Obshnost na Bulgarite Musulmani ('Pomatsite'): Obshta harakteristika' in Maltsinstvata v Bulgaria v Konteksta na Choveshkite Prava, (Sofia: Komitet za Zashtita Pravata na Maltsinstvata, 1994), p. 57. These Bulgarian scholars assert that the word 'pomak' has been used since the Bulgarian independence until the 1960s. They claim that the word Bulgarian-Mohammeds/Mohamedans was introduced in Bulgaria during the anti-Turkish campaign in 1984-1985 and has been used since in Bulgarian public and scholarly life.

⁶ Ibid., 57.

⁷ Marin Marinov. Interview. BBC World Service, Bulgarian Section. 12 May 1997.

Nevertheless, the most recent term, which seem to be preferred by the new generation of Bulgarian scholars for Pomak people, is Bulgarian Muslims.

Before the end of the Second World War Pomaks were forced to replace their Turkish or Arabic names twice: in 1912 and 1942. These campaigns were also accompanied by missionary activities, which aimed to convert the Pomaks to Eastern Orthodoxy, the official Bulgarian religion. It is thought that during these two campaigns thousands of Pomaks were converted to Christianity. At the same time the campaigns encouraged the Pomak to emigrate to Turkey.⁸ The main organisation of the Bulgarian Pomaks before 1944 was *Rodina* ('homeland'). It was created in 1937 in the town of Smolian, in the Rhodopi area, and aimed to educate the Pomaks in the traditions of Bulgarian culture. The organisation had its own monthly publication, *Sbornik Rodina* ('anthology *Rodina*'), which was issued until 1944. Before the arrival of communism two main factors affected the life of the Bulgarian Pomaks: the Bulgarian policy of conversion and the option to emigrate to Turkey or Greece. The Bulgarian attitude towards the Pomaks was highly politicised and determined by the idea that Pomaks should 'return' to their ethnic origins and become Bulgarians only. In general this policy was met with hostility by the Pomaks, who showed firm loyalty to their Muslim religion. The option of emigrating to Turkey or Greece was dictated by the idea of a better life rather than religious freedom, though Pomaks who left for Turkey did hope to find accommodation for their identity among other Muslims.

⁸ See Ylian Konstantinov, 'Strategies for Sustaining a Vulnerable Identity: The Case of the Bulgarian Pomaks' in Muslim Identity and the Balkan State, Hugh Poulton and Suha Taji-Farouki (eds.), (London: Hurst & Company in association with the Islamic Council), pp.50-51. See also Eminov, Turkish and other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria, p. 101.

The main factor which determined Pomak life in Bulgaria after the collapse of the Ottoman empire was the establishment of the Bulgarian independent state. In the new national Bulgarian state, Pomaks were an uncomfortable remainder of the Bulgarian Ottoman past, which had much longer lasting consequences than independent Bulgaria wished to acknowledge. The attempt to define Pomak identity in the context of the Bulgarian nation-state was not possible unless Pomaks changed their religion. This proved a more difficult problem than Bulgarian rulers anticipated. Although Pomaks' linguistic ties related them clearly to the Bulgarian people, they also identified with the faith of the Turkish people living in Bulgaria. Bulgarians saw this affiliation as an extension of the Turkish presence in the country and as such an undesirable expansion of the Turkish culture in Bulgaria. Thus it became central for Bulgarian politics in relation to the Pomaks to prevent the development of close ties between Pomaks and Turks. On the other hand Bulgarian Turks in general did not consider Pomaks part of their community as they were not 'Turkish' people. Yet the pressure to assimilate into the Bulgarian one-nation-state, as well as the attraction of Turkey for both Pomaks and Turks, made them share the mentality of being persecuted – and a shared desire for an escape to fresh opportunities and a new life.

The Bulgarian attitude towards Pomaks consists of two conflicting views: on one hand Pomaks are stereotyped as Bulgarians who were forced to become Muslims and therefore became a symbol of a shameful betrayal of Bulgarian Christianity. On the other hand they are declared innocent victims of the Islamic expansion in Bulgaria, who heroically retained their language. According to Bulgarian history, by hiding their Bulgarian background behind the mask of Islam, Pomaks became the repository of the most pure and antique Bulgarian customs.⁹ The Pomak way of life has been

⁹ See Rodopski Sbornik, 1976, vol.4.

mythologised and romanticised as the most genuine and authentic feature of Bulgarian ethnicity. Bulgarian scholars have worked hard to convince the Bulgarian public that Pomaks were forcibly converted to Islam during the dark times of Ottoman despotism. Yet the troublesome question remained: Why did Pomaks not convert back to Orthodox Christianity once the Ottoman menace was gone from the Bulgarian lands? Although much has been said about Pomaks' ignorance as the sole reason for their cultural inertia and political backwardness, their attachment to the Muslim faith has been a disturbing issue for the Bulgarian nationalism.

II. Pomaks under Bulgarian Communism

The issues of Pomak identity in Bulgaria have been subject to debate among Bulgarian policy-makers and scholars long before the arrival of communism. At that time, the policy was to 're-convert' Pomaks 'back' to Orthodox Christianity.¹⁰ Communism did not resort to the same method because it was an atheist ideology. The contradiction seemed far too obvious to place the question of religion as the main problem. The BCP had to answer the most difficult question about why and what were Pomaks supposed to convert back to? If Pomaks were ethnic Bulgarians, what were the main features of their identity which needed correction? The answer of Bulgarian communism was that Pomaks should become true socialist citizens of Bulgaria by: a) denouncing their religion, and b) changing their Muslim names to Bulgarian. Self-evidently Bulgarian communism decided to demand eradication of any sign of cultural otherness among the Pomak population.

Communist policy towards Pomaks in Bulgaria went through different stages and used different methods. Until 1951 resettlement to Turkey seemed one way of solving the Pomak problem. During the 1960s dislocation accompanied the campaign for the re-naming of the Pomaks. By the mid 1970s all Pomaks were renamed and the special communist policy for their acculturation resulted in serious isolation from Bulgarian society. Communism rejected the Bulgarian policy towards the Pomaks before 1944 as totally wrong. It was said that the Bulgarian bourgeois governments, capitalist and fascist by nature, intentionally abused the Pomak population and left them to live in misery. Moreover the pre-communist Bulgarian legislation and policy on emigration was said to

¹⁰ See Georgi Genov, 'Pravnoto Polozhenie na Maltsinstvata', *Godishnik na Sofiiskyat Uridicheski Fakultet*, (Sofia: 1929), vol. XXIV (1928/1929), pp. 1-272.

have been influenced by the Muslim leaders of the Pomak and Turkish community as well as by Turkish agents in Bulgaria.¹¹ Further on the pre-communist Bulgarian policy of converting Pomaks to Orthodox Christianity was condemned as the high point of humiliation and abuse, a result of the bourgeoisie's unrestrained chauvinism.¹²

After declaring that Pomaks were Bulgarian socialist citizens, the BCP embarked on the implementation of a special program designed for the acculturation (*priobshtavane*) of the Pomaks. The idea was to re-educate the Pomak population in the spirit of Bulgarian communism by developing a wide cultural and educational infrastructure.¹³ But behind the scene of the official declarations of the cultural and economic advancement of the Bulgarian Pomaks, the communist party conducted a very different policy. After 1948 there were several attempts to force the Pomaks to change their names and renounce their faith. Poulton observes that during the initial campaign (1948-52) Bulgarian authorities subjected the Pomaks to pressure to adopt Bulgarian names and resettled some of them in order to dismantle their tight communities.¹⁴ The main result of the first campaign conducted by the BCP was that the Pomak population became increasingly aware of its insecure position in Bulgarian society. Consequently many members of the community began to identify themselves as Turks as a protective mechanism for their Muslim identity. Also, if identified as Turks, Pomaks could apply to emigrate to Turkey. The Bulgarian communist government viewed this process as very undesirable and in

¹¹ See Iz minaloto na bulgarite mohamedani v Rodopite, (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata Akademia na Naukite, Institut za Bulgarska Istoria, 1958), pp. 100-137.

¹² Ibid., p. 133.

¹³ See Tsviatko Monov, 'Razvitie i deinost na narodnite chitalishta, kinata, muzeite i drugite kulturni instituti v rodopskiya krai (1944-1973)' in Hr. Hristov, P. Petrov, Str. Dimitrov (eds.), Rodopski Sbornik, (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata Akademia na Naukite, 1976), vol. IV, pp. 7-40.

1962 declared that special measures would be taken to reverse the ‘Turkification’ of the Bulgarian Pomaks. The main aims of the BCP program were to intensify the party propaganda in the Pomak regions, to prevent Pomaks from moving to Turkish villages and learning the Turkish language. Also the party emphasised the importance of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in further uncovering of the ‘historical truth’ about the Pomaks as victims of Turkish assimilation carried out in Ottoman times.¹⁵ Soon afterwards the BCP undertook another campaign to change the Muslim names of the Pomaks and to persuade them to give up their faith. This time the campaign was met with resistance and the Muslim names of the Pomaks were partially restored. Yet only several years later yet another campaign was carried out and between 1971-73 all Pomaks were forced to change their names and adopt Bulgarian ones. This time the resistance was stronger and the Bulgarian authorities put it down violently.¹⁶

Similarly to the communist policy to the Bulgarian Turks, the policy towards the Pomaks was dictated by Bulgarian cultural nationalism which considered Muslim personal names as a marker of alien culture. Konstantinov argues that during the 1940s and the very early 1950s the BCP’s policy towards the Bulgarian national minorities was to ‘let people go’.¹⁷ Indeed during this time the majority of the Bulgarian Jews left for Israel (1947-49)

¹⁴ See Eminov, Turkish and other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria, pp. 101-102.

¹⁵ Ibid., Appendix H ‘Measures Against the Turkish Self-Identification of Gypsies, Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) and Tatars Approved by the Politburo, April, 1962, pp. 191-194.

¹⁶ Ibid., 106.

¹⁷ Konstantinov, ‘Strategies for Sustaining a Vulnerable Identity’, pp. 47-48.

and many Bulgarian 'Turks' also emigrated to Turkey.¹⁸ The Pomaks were in a more difficult position because they had no other nation-state to go to.

However during the 1960s and 1970s, the BCP made it clear that the Pomak identity should be changed and that the Bulgarian Pomaks should become Bulgarians only. This policy was in accord with the general orientation of Bulgarian communism towards cultural nationalism during those years. The BCP demanded the ethnic homogenisation of the Bulgarian nation: the Pomaks fell victims of this attitude.¹⁹ Essentially the repeated re-naming campaigns against the Bulgarian Pomaks were motivated by the same idea, which in 1984-85 motivated the anti-Turkish campaign, the 'Revival process'. All people living in communist Bulgaria were supposed to be of Bulgarian ethnic identity and any cultural differences deriving from ethnicity were to be eliminated.

The re-naming campaigns towards the Pomaks under communism remained largely unknown to the Bulgarian public. This was so partly because they were carried out in stages and because the Pomaks were a smaller community of people, who lived in isolation. They were barely represented in the political structures of communist Bulgaria and had no educated class of their own. Yet the crucial reason for the silence which accompanied the re-naming campaigns against the Pomaks was that they had no other mother-country apart from Bulgaria – unlike the Bulgarian Turks, who had Turkey.

Despite the desire to become Turkish on behalf of one part of the community, Pomaks

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 48. Konstantinov thinks that between 1950-1951 about 15, 000 Turks were allowed to leave to Turkey. Among them there were Pomaks, but the Bulgarian authorities did not object.

¹⁹ See Chapter 3 of this thesis for the changes in the BCP policy towards the Macedonian question in 1968 and the gradual closing down of the Turkish schooling in communist Bulgaria.

were never accepted by the community of Bulgarian Turks or by Turkey as Turks.²⁰ They received no support from the outside and belonged to no other nation or state. Pomaks had nowhere to look for protection. Therefore their protest and resistance to the Bulgarian communist policy remained largely unheard inside and outside communist Bulgaria.²¹

Yet Pomak's identity has been a painful issue for Bulgarian cultural nationalism. On one hand, the idea that Pomaks were ethnic Bulgarians who were converted forcibly to Islam during Ottoman rule feeds the powerful national myth of the long suffering of the Bulgarian people. Pomaks have been the living proof that Bulgarians were subjected to forcible assimilation by their traditional enemy - the Ottomans. On the other hand, the Pomak community has also served as strong evidence that the Bulgarian identity could be changed. Previously Bulgarians, Pomaks became different people. The idea that people could change national identity has been rejected and is viewed as a terrifying thought by modern Bulgaria.

The question about the Pomak identity has been further complicated by the fact that they have not claimed any national identity unless forced to do so. The communist policy

²⁰ See Eminov, Turkish and other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria, p. 106. Turkey appears to have objected to emigration of the Pomaks alongside the Bulgarian Turks.

²¹ After the establishment of the Bulgarian-Greek border after the Second World War, contact between the Bulgarian Pomaks and their Greek kin was severed. From then onwards the two states engaged in a conflict over the Pomak community. Bulgaria and Greece claimed that Pomaks were misguided parts of the respective majority population in each country. Konstantinov argues that during the Cold War the Bulgarian communist authorities used male Pomaks to guard the Greek and Turkish borders. The Pomaks were expected to assist border control and to report on people trying to cross the border with Greece. See Konstantinov, 'Strategies for Sustaining a Vulnerable Identity', p.47.

put pressure on the Bulgarian Pomaks to declare themselves Bulgarian. The idea that Pomaks were actually Turks took ground before communism came to Bulgaria. But it accelerated in response to the communist pressure and was one of the unintended results of the communist policy, which gave it a special significance. Bulgarian Pomaks responded to the communist definition of who they were with their own version.²² Pomaks reject the core idea that they were converted forcibly to Islam during Ottoman rule. Instead an alternative history of Pomak conversion to Islam has been offered in their oral culture. According to this version of history, Pomaks shared a common Slavo-Tracian past with the Bulgarians and converted to Islam between the 9th and 12th centuries, i.e., before the Ottoman arrival in the Balkans. This version has it that the Pomaks' conversion to Islam was an act of free and moral will. Bulgarian Pomaks started claiming that they accepted the Muslim faith directly from Arab missionaries, not from the Ottomans. Lozanova argues that Pomaks developed this 'quasi-academic theory' about the parallel historical development of Christians and Muslims in the Bulgarian lands. According to her, this theory acts as an alternative version to the Bulgarian history, which constructed a negative stereotype about the Pomaks as being traitors of the Bulgarian Christianity.²³ Konstantinov also argues that as a reaction to the Bulgarian communist state 'monopoly' over the Pomak identity, the Pomaks created their own theory about their origins. According to him 'the indeterminate state of the Pomaks' identity' led the community to seek for "proofs" which establish an original Pomak identity – one which is more acceptable than the Turkish..²⁴ Nevertheless, the Bulgarian

²² See Galina Lozanova, 'Sakralna Sreshtu Realna Istoria na Bulgarite Musulmani v Rodopite' in Rositsa Gradeva and Svetlana Ivanova (eds.), Musulmanskata Kutura po Bulgarskite Zemi, (Sofia: Mezhdunaroden Center po Problemite na Maltsinstvata i Kulturnite Vzaimodeistvia, 1998), pp. 451-463.

²³ Ibid., p. 455.

²⁴ Konstantinov, 'Strategies for Sustaining a Vulnerable Identity', pp. 35-37.

communist policy intensified the Pomaks' desire to keep the reality of their cultural identity private. Pomak communities in Bulgaria have been living in isolation since the 19th century. Under communism the intervention of the state in their life was more than ever associated with danger and destruction. Therefore under communism Bulgarian Pomaks became accustomed to living in the niche of their 'clandestine identity', which was to be exposed to new threats after the changes in 1989.²⁵

²⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

III. Conclusion

Despite the theoretical confusions and obvious incoherence of the Bulgarian communist attitude towards Pomaks, one major feature of their life remained unchanged under communism— unlike the Turkish presence, the Pomak community was never perceived as a big threat to the preservation of Bulgarian national culture. This was mainly because Pomaks spoke Bulgarian language - an important tool in the communist argument that they were ethnic Bulgarians - and the Pomak community was much smaller than the Bulgarian Turks'. More generally, Pomaks have been part of the continuing debate about the Bulgarian connection to Islam and the broader issue of the importance of religion for ethnic identities, including during the communist period. Bulgarian communism largely exploited the belief that language is the most decisive feature of ethnic identity and therefore claimed that Pomaks are ethnic Bulgarians. But the Pomaks' resistance to this claim showed that questions of ethnicity, nationalism and identity were more complex and required a different understanding. The Bulgarian communist policy towards the Pomaks also had unintended effects. When communism arrived in Bulgaria, 90 per cent of the Pomaks lived in the Rhodopi mountains, both in small dispersed towns and in secluded villages almost completely inaccessible. Their economic position was weak and the communities survived by seasonal work. They were deeply isolated and marginalised. Communism promised to change Pomaks' life dramatically. They were to become Bulgarian socialist citizens equal to everyone else regardless of their religious affiliation. But in fact the special policy of economic and cultural development of the Pomaks, introduced by the BCP, only reinforced their segregation. As Konstantinov argues, during communism isolation and lack of mobility among the Bulgarian Pomaks created a new 'occupational' boundary, which strengthened the dividing line between Pomaks and the rest of the Bulgarian people. Pomaks became 'Islamic peasant-workers' who

developed their own economy - a combination of agricultural and manufacturing work, which generally nobody else in Bulgaria practised.²⁶ Another unintended effect of the communist policy was that Pomaks' experience of forcible assimilation under communism encouraged their identification with the community of the Bulgarian Turks instead of moving them further apart. This affiliation became particularly strong during the anti-Turkish campaign, the 'Revival process', carried out in the mid-1980s. The ties between the Pomaks and the Bulgarian Turks concerned the communist authorities greatly. During the forcible expulsion of the Bulgarian Turks in 1989, Bulgarian authorities made it clear that Pomaks would not be allowed to leave the country, unlike the Turks who were invited to go.²⁷ Communist Bulgaria believed that there was no separate Pomak identity and demanded their forcible inclusion into a homogenous ethnic Bulgarian nation. Bulgarian Pomaks' dual identity was rejected by communism because it was not Bulgarian only.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 43.

²⁷ See Hugh Poulton, The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict, (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1991, p. 113.

Chapter 6: The Limits of Bulgarian Jewish Identity under Communism

I. Introduction

When Elias Canetti was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1981, the Bulgarian authorities kept the announcement short. Canetti was born in the town of Russe, in Bulgaria, in 1905, raised in Vienna, Manchester and Zurich, and wrote in German. His knotty life was a confusion for socialist Bulgaria where Canetti was not popular. The communists did not want to know about Crowds and Power (1960), with its insights into the catastrophic direction mass action and anonymous equality could take. Yet the National Heritage paid respect by listing Canetti's family house as a memorial.

In 1996 I went to Russe to see for myself what was left of the Jewish community there, which Canetti described in his memoirs as the intellectual inspiration of his early creative development. Russe was one a bustling trading port on the Danube, an old Ottoman gateway to Europe. In 1915 Canetti returned to visit his native Ruschuk as it was then called. His mother, an ambitious and educated woman, identified two reasons for the mannerless border control: the incurable Balkan harshness and the family's Turkish passports. In his memoirs, The Tongue Set Free (1977), he remembers his early awareness of the national passions which divided the old Ottoman lands. Canetti talks about Bulgarian Jews preferring the imperial world with its cosmopolitan travel and trade. Many of them were scared of the empire's dismantling. They feared the divisions and partitions of people and territories, and found refuge in Ottoman society.

In Canetti's Ruschuk, people spoke many languages: Greek, Romanian, Russian, Turkish, Armenian,

Roma. Fairy tales and family celebrations translated mysteriously and unconsciously from Bulgarian and Ladino, the language of the Sephardic household, into German, the language of the emancipated Central European Jewry. Canetti's grandfather liked to walk around Vienna and shamelessly shock the cognoscenti, that he, who lived in Russe, could converse in 17 languages.

The dissolution of the Ottoman empire and the scattering of Canetti's family were painful, the unity of communism and, of course, National Socialism were far worse.

The first synagogue in Russe was a gift from the Ottoman ruler Mustafa Bairaktar Pasha, and was built at the end of the 18th century. Today's Jewish community centre Shalom was constructed on the site of another synagogue, which was a storehouse during communism.

Soaked in summer tranquillity, Russe's elegance is disordered. With sickly post-communist merchandising, jumbled coffee shops and many change bureau, it is a typical Bulgarian provincial city. The Austrian styles seem to outline the dusty city boundaries of this southern Danubian corner.

Jewish traces are evident. "Take a picture of me, too," an elderly man requests, after showing me the unmistakable Jewish ornaments of his terrace. Around the corner, a synagogue is being reconstructed as an Evangelical church, but the new occupiers promise to keep its beautiful wooden ceiling. "Don't take these things too seriously," advises my companion. In the 1970s the regime erected a huge memorial of to Bulgarian liberation where the old Jewish cemetery used to be. There have been so many changes, and he is worried I might overinterpret the faint traces that do remain.

Canetti's home is not a famous tourist place. On a Sunday afternoon, the neighbourhood is napping. The narrow street leading there hides its introvert residents. People are neither surprised nor intrigued by the occasional visitors: there is nothing more they can tell you. Some actually think that his house was

demolished and the modest sign is wrong.

There is another intriguing story about Russe, communism and the Jews. The structure and the interior of the big house in the sidewalk of the town's centre is still elegant, though unmistakably shattered by many years of neglect. It belonged to Ventura, a wealthy pre-war Bulgarian Jewish merchant. His daughter Ani died in the resistance, aged 18. For some time, Bulgarian history held her as a hero of the underground movement. Her portrait could be found in the communist history books. But then the name faded away, as the communist party 'cleansed' and unified its memory.

It turns out that Ani's story was muddled with politics of ethnicity. According to some of the inhabitants of Russe, Ventura expelled his daughter from home because she loved Isidor, a young and poor Jewish communist, so she died, forsaken. Others believe she eloped with Isidor and was killed instead of him-by mistake. But everyone agrees that it was wrong to forget her regardless of whether she believed in communism or love alone. Nowadays the Ventura house hosts a Roma organisation, a restaurant and a library.

Both stories show the dynamic role Jews played in Bulgarian cultural and political life and the quiet way in which the fact has been swept away - either by neglect, repression or some combination of the two. Jewishness is the national question Bulgaria would simply prefer to forget.

This chapter focuses on perceptions of Jewish identity under communism in Bulgaria. It examines three main themes to understand the communist approach and policy towards the Bulgarian Jews. First 'who saved the Bulgarian Jews' during the Second World War? The common answer - that the Bulgarian communist movement was responsible for the survival of the Jewish community - reveals the communist concepts of the identity of the Bulgaria Jews as well as the role of the Bulgarian government and society in the course of

the war. This research pays special attention to the Jewish deportations from Macedonia and Thrace and the communist view of these events, which took place under the Bulgarian administration of these territories. Second why and how did Bulgarian Jews resettle en mass to Israel after the war? This question is analysed in the context of the BCP approach towards national questions in the immediate aftermath of the war and in relation to the Soviet control of domestic politics in Bulgaria. Between 1947 and 1949 over 45,000 Jews left Bulgaria. The research seeks to analyse the implications of the mass Jewish exodus from Bulgaria for the communist attitudes towards ethnic diversity. Third, how and why was Jewish education eradicated and Jewish cultural and community institutions gradually closed? This question reveals the communist policy of Jewish assimilation in Bulgaria. Although officially assimilation of the Bulgaria Jews was never declared as the ultimate aim of the BCP, Bulgarisation was the only acceptable way of Jewish survival under communism.

Additionally the history of the Jewish communities under the Ottoman empire is central for the understanding of the popular perception of the Jews in the Balkans in general and in Bulgaria in particular. Jewish anxieties at the eve of the Bulgarian national liberation at the end of the 19th century put them in a confused position in relation to the modern Bulgarian statehood.¹ The relationship between Jewish ethnicity and Bulgarian cultural nationalism under communism was illustrated in the case of Bulgaria. Bulgarian communism tried to accommodate the events of Jewish history in Bulgaria to the Bulgarian national mythology. The myth about the civilising mission of the Bulgarian

¹ See Gabriel Aric, A Sephardi Life in Southeastern Europe: The Autobiography and Journal of Gabriel Aric, 1863-1939, Aron Rodrigue and Esther Benbassa (eds.), (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1998). Also See Stanford J. Shaw, The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, (Houndmills, Basingstoke,

people and the myth about the Bulgarian tolerance became central to promoting cultural nationalism in communist Bulgaria by using Bulgarian Jewish identity. At the same time, the association of the Jews with communist movement encouraged the popular Bulgarian view that Jews were collaborators of the communist regime. This perception acted in accord with older ideas of Jews as collaborators with the Ottoman despotism. Thus Jews were largely stereotyped as a hostile party to the Bulgarian national interests in general.

However under communism Jews were not seen as a big threat to the ethnic Bulgarian nation in the way the Turkish identity was. This was so on the first place because the Jewish community was much smaller in numbers. But also very importantly, although Christians were the historical enemy of the Jews, for the Balkan Christians, Islam was far bigger menace.

II. Historical Background

The history of the Bulgarian Jewry is an inseparable part of the Ottoman past of Bulgaria and the Balkans in general. Jews occupied a specific position in Ottoman society. For most of the time they enjoyed special protections provided by the Ottoman authorities. Under the Ottoman empire Jews interacted in a somewhat special way both with the Christians and the Muslims. The most important consequence of this was that Jewish integration into the Bulgarian nation-state after the Ottomans withdrew was particularly difficult. This in its own turn affected the Bulgarian perception of the Jews in the new independent Bulgaria. The period during which Jews lived alongside the Christians under the Ottoman rule in Bulgaria (1393-1878) is of major importance for the understanding of the framework of the inter-communal relations established in the Bulgarian lands. Essentially the Ottomans regulated the relations between the Christian and the Jewish communities for almost five hundred years and the empire's model continued to have an impact on the majority/minorities relations when the new nation-states were established in the Balkans.

III. Jewish Arrival in the Old Bulgarian Lands

Although there is evidence of Jews living in the Balkans from very early times, it is largely accepted that they re-settled there after the Christians. According to Shaw the first Jewish communities in Bulgaria were established during the 16th century in Nikopol and in Vidin, both on the river Danube. From there Jews moved to Russe. There were also smaller communities to be found in Shoumen and Varna in the north east of the country. Additionally smaller Jewish communities were established in Kustendil and Samokov in the western part of the Bulgarian lands. Rozanes notes that the cities of Vratsa and Lom which were on the roads connecting Central Europe with the Balkans, from Belgrade and Vienna also attracted Jewish settlers.² At that time, the town of Sofia, which was later to become a centre of Jewish life in Bulgaria, hosted a very small Jewish community.³ Most of the Jews who settled in the Balkan lands during the times of the Ottoman empire escaped persecution from Portugal and Spain. Escaping from persecution was the most important event in Jewish life and it affected the way they viewed their new homeland. For them the Ottomans were their hosts, not conquerors, as they were for the Christians. Typically, as refugees, Jews to a great extent conformed to society which offered them asylum.

There was another feature of the Jewish character in the Balkans which made them a particular ethnic minority . There were many Jews from Spain, who came to the Balkans with high-class attitudes and a superior cultural status. This was because the Sephardim of Spain did not know the *ghetto* life of Jews in Eastern and Central Europe. Before the

² See Shelomo Avraam Rozanes, Istoria na Evreiskata Obshtina v Russe: Po Izvorni Materiali. Ot Drevni vremena do 1852, Isaak Moskona (tr.), (Russe: 1914), vol. I.

³ See Shaw, The Jews of the Ottoman Empire, 1991.

expulsion by and large Spanish Jews lived well, and openly enjoyed their material and cultural achievements. Shaw argues that this high social status was the main feature of the Balkan Sephardic community, which made them significantly more open to change compared to their kin in other parts of Europe: 'They never had known the limitations and the scorn of the *ghettos* of Central Europe. They had mixed freely with their social equals in Muslim Spain, both Christians and Muslims, so once arrived in the Ottoman empire they lacked the servility and even shyness toward superiors which characterised the other Jewish groups, in consequence looking down on the latter as ignorant and backward'.⁴ This made Jews quite different subordinate ethnic minority from the Christians in relation to the Ottoman authorities. As a community the Balkan Jews did not view the Ottomans as people who prevented them from achievement and success, but rather they thought of them as the masters who helped their survival in times of disaster. The Ottomans used the commercial skills as well as the cultural heritage Jews brought with them. This of course gave them a somewhat privileged position within the Ottoman society. Jews responded with loyalty to those in power. Such was the special position of the Jews during the Jewish Golden Age in the Balkans, which lasted roughly between 16th and 18th century. Jewish life of this period was concentrated in Constantinople (Istanbul), the capital of the Ottoman empire. The largest Jewish city in South Eastern Europe at this time was Thessaloniki. There were also concentrated Jewish populations in the Macedonian settlements of Monastir and Skopje.

⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

IV. Balkan Jews Under the Ottomans

Generally speaking Jews were held in a higher status than the Christians under Ottoman rule. Technically Jews were classified as 'unbelievers' as the Christians were. But very importantly they enjoyed various economic and tax concessions. Jews had a higher and privileged position in trade till the late 17th century. They could witness in Ottoman Muslim courts and because of their multilingual skills, often acted as interpreters at the court. In general they were preferred in the conversion to the Christians and after conversion they were allowed to keep their own and father's names. Later Jews paid their taxes to the leaders of their own *millet* and not directly to the tax collectors as usually was the case with the Christians. This meant that Jews rarely came into negative contact with the representatives of Ottoman power. At the same time, the privileges Jews had under the Ottomans should not be exaggerated. Peneva argues that their privileges were not simply as a result of the appreciation the Ottomans had for the Jews. She notes that Ottomans used Jewish professional skills for the 'expansionist ambitions of the Sultans' as the Jews were quite well connected to the world.⁵

Despite the concessions made to them, Jews remained subjects to the Sultan and like the Christians were restricted in many ways, particularly by the exemption from military service, which made them equally powerless. Also their particular connection to Ottoman commerce made them dependent on developments in the Ottoman empire over which they had no control. The Ottoman decline during the 17th and 18th century badly affected the Balkan Jewish communities. Although they participated in the legal

⁵ See Marina Peneva, 'Oblekloto na evreite v balkanskite provintsii na Osmanskata imperia', in *Godishnik*, Obshtestvena Kulturno-Prosvetna Organizatsia na Evreite v Narodna Republika Bulgaria: Centralno Rukovodstvo, (1985), vol. 20, pp. 102-103.

structures in a more active way, the lack of stable rule of law at this time in the Ottoman empire increased corruption and led to all kinds of insecurities, which affected the Jews.

All *millets* were shaken by attacks of irregulars and the previously peaceful inter-communal life was seriously disturbed. Ethnic tension in the Ottoman empire grew and the cultural isolation increased. Despite their relative openness to change, Jews were fearful and looked suspiciously to the Ottoman reforms in 19th century. With the advancement of the national liberation movement of the Balkan Christians, they felt increasingly insecure. The Ottoman empire with all its deficiencies seemed safer to them than the prospect of new states ruled by their old foe, the Christians.

V. Jews and Christians: Shared Traditions

The interaction between the Christian and the Jewish traditions followed quite a similar pattern to the Christian-Muslim communication on the level of religion. Research on the Turkish minority in Bulgaria suggests that despite the very obvious differences in the Christian and Muslim outlook, there have been certain similarities between the two faiths based on the unorthodox Muslim and Christian traditions in the Balkans. The various Islamic sects were more open to influences and more compatible with Christian practices than usually thought. The two religious worlds were bridged at certain points, though traditionally they have been seen as antithetical. It is clear that in theory Christianity and Judaism were also very different. The lack of personified God in Judaism is the most obvious differential. Yet again, unorthodox Judaism was not in total disagreement with the Christian faith of its neighbours. The most notable meeting point was the messianic attitudes which Balkan Jews adhered to. Jewish exiles from Spain and Portugal brought obscurantist attitudes and mysticism to the Balkans. Originally Jewish mystic tradition developed to a great extent as a result of the experience of the Inquisition in Spain. Jewish education adopted a distinct mode of mysticism attempting to comprehend the huge disaster. The suffering seemed so undeserved and so sudden that the only way to explain it was through irrational attitudes. Later Messianic expectations deepened during the 17th century with the spread of the Sabateanism, which was essentially a movement of the followers of Sabbetai Zevi, who was believed to be a messiah and a convert to Islam. Shaw thinks that Sephardic messianism was born in response to the general economic decline of the Ottoman empire during the 17th century, which led to poor education, puritanism and extreme religious obedience.⁶ Messianism offered the promise of radical improvement in an unbearable life. It was rooted in folk culture rather than orthodox

Judaism. Benbassa writes that 'for the barely literate and often illiterate Sephardic masses, the appeal of the messiah lay in folk religion, in the system of thought and practice that, through an admixture of normative belief, superstition, and magic, tried to make sense of an often dismal reality.'⁷ This messianistic tradition was not as alien to the Balkan Christians, as the scholarly Judaism. Christian peasants also had a strong inclination towards messianism. This was also in response to the harshness of life. In this manner messianism cut across the divide between Jews and Christians. Although it is not known to have amounted to any particular active interaction or exchange of thoughts, nevertheless messianism was a trend of belief which the two communities shared.

This, rather than the natural tolerance of the peasantry, as asserted by the Bulgarian historiography, may be seen as the root of the relatively peaceful co-existence between the Christians and Jews in the Balkan lands. It appears that the systematic outlook towards the Jews was that they were different but not necessarily hostile. In Bulgaria anti-Semitism was seldom registered before the late 19 century.⁸ Chary observes that

⁶ See Shaw, The Jews of the Ottoman Empire, 1991.

⁷ Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, The Jews of the Balkans: The Judeo-Spanish Community, 15th to 20th Centuries, (Oxford & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1995), p. 59.

⁸ See Shaw, The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, p. 85. Despite the rather insignificant position of the Jews in the most of the Bulgarian lands at that time, occasional acts of anti-Semitism were registered. The main expression of anti-Semitism was embodied in the old Christian belief in ritual murder. According to this belief Jews killed Christian children on the major Jewish holiday Pessah (Passover) and drunk their blood. Attacks on Jews on such occasions were registered in the Ottoman lands in 16th century when the Jewish community in the Ottoman empire grew in numbers and enjoyed economic prosperity. According to Shaw they seemed to have been committed mainly by Armenians and Greeks in the regions of Anatolia. It also appears that there were occasions when Jews were held responsible for their actions as Jews. But there is little accurate historic evidence about this. Shaw mentions the case of the

Bulgarian anti-Semitism, being primarily rural, was less violent than the urban middle-class anti-Semitism observed in the Central European cities.⁹ Thus Christian-Jewish interaction in the Bulgarian lands under the Ottomans was not only a result of carefully managed relations between them as different ethnic groups by the Ottoman law, but also a consequence of shared unorthodox religious tradition.

breakaway Ottoman feudal lord Osman Pazvantoglu who ruled in the north-west of the Bulgarian lands along the river Danube. His Jewish physician was blamed for his death after the Austrian occupation of Belgrade and Vidin in 1689. More systematic anti-Semitism was apparent in the late 19th century and particularly while the Ottomans were leaving and the after Bulgarian independence. In his account of anti-Semitic acts in the Bulgarian lands Chary includes pogroms of the 19th century, again around rumours for ritual Pessah. According to him the most well known were in Pazardjik (1885), in Sofia (1884) and in Varna (1890). See also Frederick B. Chary, The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution 1940-1944, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), p. 32.

⁹ See Chary, The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution, pp.32-34.

VI. Bulgarian National Independence

The Bulgarian national independence of 1878 was an enormous change in the life of all ethnic communities on the territory. Jewish life in Bulgaria changed forever. The Jews, who previously lived dispersed in the Ottoman empire found themselves restricted by the new borders of the national states, which emerged after the collapse of the empire. From being Balkan Jews, the new Bulgarian borders, decided at the Berlin Congress of 1878 determined the new location and position of the Jewish communities. Jews were now a small and scattered community of around 50,000, consisting predominantly of urban populations in small cities, with no particularly strong financial position, culturally cut off from the rest of the Jewish communities in the Balkans and Europe. From being part of a rather cosmopolitan Ottoman Balkan community, they were now defined as Bulgarian Jews only. Similarly to the remaining Turkish people, Jews became passive and withdrew to the margins of the new state. The main Jewish cultural centres remained outside their new country, independent Bulgaria. The only remaining cultural centre was Sofia, where a Jewish press flourished throughout the 19th century until the Second World War. The Bulgarian Jewish community was cut off from its traditional cultural and commercial centres: Istanbul, Thessaloniki, Izmir, Edrine.¹⁰ According to Benbassa, Jews

¹⁰ During the 15th and 16th centuries there were no Jewish schools in the territory which was to become independent Bulgaria. Jewish education was located mainly in the Macedonian region. During this time there were three main types of Jewish religious schools: *talmud*, *torahs* and *yeshivas*. Thessaloniki (Salonica) had a well-established system of Jewish schools and there were also religious Jewish schools of these types in Istanbul, Monastir, Demotica, Edrine, Skopje, Kavala and Izmir. In the 19th century there was an overall revival of the Jewish press in the Ottoman lands. Shaw points out that two thirds of the total Jewish newspapers in the Ottoman empire during the 19th century were in Salonica, Istanbul, Sofia and Izmir. It appears that Sofia was a rather big publishing

did rely on the Ottoman power structures for protection from the periphery: 'The Jewish communities continued to identify strongly with the central authorities and regarded the appearance of new national options in the modern period with mistrust'.¹¹ The main source of Jewish insecurity, after the collapse of the Ottoman empire, was the uncertainty over the new regulations in the new nation-states, including Bulgaria. In difference to the Christian majority at this point, they had no state on their own to look to for protection, and had to rely entirely on international agreements for protection of the minorities. This connected Jews in a particular way to international politics, which the new states did not consider a necessarily positive development. Bulgaria did not view the intervention of the Great Powers as favourable to her at all, and any ideas about how Jewish matters should be conducted were seen along these lines. Thus Jews were not only associated with the former imperial power in Bulgaria but also with the new regulations imposed on the young state from the outside. One way or another Bulgaria Jews seemed not solely a 'Bulgarian' problem.

At the Congress of Berlin there was pressure from Jewish organisations in Europe, on both the British and Ottoman governments, to guarantee the protection of the Jewish minorities in the Balkans. The partition of Bulgarian territory was perceived as a great trauma for the Bulgarian state. The Great Powers, who the Bulgarians blamed, were also campaigning for the protection of minorities under the new government. In any case, Article 5, the clause of the Treaty of Berlin concerning minorities in Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia was incorporated into the Turnovo Constitution in April 1879, the foundation legal document of the new Bulgarian state, the Jewish community was ruled by

centre. For more details see Shaw, The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, p. 181.

¹¹ Benbassa and Rodrigue, The Jews of the Balkans, p.2.

democratically elected local council, placed under the authority of the Chief Rabbi paid by the state. As Benbassa observes : ‘The clergy was thus placed under the authority of its own spiritual leaders but supervised by the state.’¹² The new independent Bulgaria acknowledged that Jews were a minority, which was to be represented in the new society and state structures.

¹² Ibid., p. 93.

VII. The Interwar Period

Between the two wars, Bulgarian Jews were seen as a harmless, politically passive and socially marginal community. They had little say in the political developments of the Bulgarian state and very limited commercial power. This latter characteristic is quite significant because the economic wealth of the Jewish communities was a very strong argument against them in Eastern and Central Europe and most notably in Germany. Bulgarian Jews were never identified as commercially prosperous community in the same manner, though they were associated strongly with urban culture. During the interwar period Jewish affairs were not considered as any kind a problem in Bulgaria. As a matter of fact the Bulgarian state did not see the status of the Jewish community as a matter for debate. For most of the time Bulgaria was torn apart by the Macedonian problem, the most serious national question in the country. Seton-Watson argues that Jews in Bulgaria did not represent a significant problem during the interwar years because they were too small in numbers.¹³ This certainly is a convincing argument. Jewish life was quite visible in the big city centres and particularly in Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna and Russe. At the same time there was no doubt that the ethnic Bulgarian culture was the country's dominant culture.

The lack of Jewish participation in Bulgarian politics in any significant manner said something about the actual position of the Jews in the society. Benbassa believes that the lack of Jewish representation in high positions of the Bulgarian army or administrative structures revealed undeclared anti-Semitism: 'The Jews of Bulgaria did not particularly distinguish themselves in the political and cultural life of the country. The prevailing anti-

¹³ See Hugh Seton-Watson, The 'Sick Heart' of Modern Europe: The Problem of the Danubian Lands, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1975), p. 33.

Semitism was not unconnected with this state of affairs.¹⁴ But he does not give any factual evidence for the existence of anti-Semitism in interwar Bulgaria. In a similar manner Shaw concludes that although Bulgaria had the best record of treatment of Jews after the establishment of the independent state, there was hidden anti-Semitism in the 'invisible and unofficial' governmental arrangements.¹⁵ The difficulty with the question of whether there was anti-Semitism in Bulgaria before the Second World War is that there is no precise way of measuring the level of anti-Semitism until actual persecution takes place. It is also extremely difficult to collect enough information about anti-Semitic actions or feelings in order to give a straight answer to the question of whether there were any roots of anti-Semitism in Bulgaria before the spread of Nazi ideas. The best account of the insecurities experienced by the Jews around this time is to be found in the diary of Gabriel Arie. In this rare memoir Arie describes the turmoil which the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the consequent establishment of independent Bulgaria actually caused in the life of the Jewish community. He mentions that there were occasional worries about expressions of anti-Semitism in the Bulgarian press. But according to his account the main concern of the community was the disconnection from the other Jewish communities in the Balkans and particularly the one in Istanbul.

¹⁶On balance it seems that during the interwar period the Bulgarian Jewish community was not subject to any special policy which may be labelled as anti-Semitic.

But the formation of an independent Bulgarian state had a substantial impact on Jewish life. The process of Jewish integration began. Jews started learning Bulgarian language seriously. The linguistic acculturation of the Bulgarian Jews became the most important

¹⁴ Benbassa and Rodrigue, The Jews of the Balkans, p. 94.

¹⁵ See Shaw, The Jews of the Ottoman Empire, p. 191.

¹⁶ See Arie, A Sephardi Life in Southeastern Europe, p. 96 and p. 107.

characteristic of their new life. Benbassa defines the whole period as lacking excesses of anti-Semitic actions but nevertheless unfavourable to the Jews. He believes that integration of the Jews in the new nation-states in the Balkans was far more problematic than often thought. According to him Bulgaria was not an exception in this respect: 'the process of change did not bring a significant integration into the surrounding society. The Jews remained apart, anxious to keep a low profile.'¹⁷ Although Jewish integration strengthened during the interwar period it was very far from an accomplished process. Apart from language Bulgarian Jews continued to live more or less in the same style they had before. Similarly to the Bulgarian Turks, Jews thought of this period as a transitional one and waited in the margins of the society for better times to come.

¹⁷ Benbassa and Rodrigue, The Jews of the Balkans, p. 104.

VIII. Zionism in Bulgaria

Bulgarian communism argued that most of the Jews living in the country had a strong socialist orientation from very early.¹⁸ The main idea behind this claim was to represent the Bulgarian communist movement as united and engaged in 'pure' socialist ideology, untainted by questions of ethnicity, which the Jewish involvement inevitably involved. According to the theory all people who took part in the communist movement were motivated by the ideas of the class struggle. In general Jewish involvement with communist ideas during the Second World War has been quite controversial from the point of view of the communist movement because of the complexities of Jewish persecution, which was essentially ethnic by nature. In the Bulgarian case the communist idea was to show that Bulgarian communists fought together with all oppressed people, because they were oppressed. The communist party history explained Jewish participation on the basis of their class identity - Bulgarian Jews were declared socialists from the time before the arrival of Nazi ideas in Bulgaria. The aim was to show that Jews became communists not as a result of ethnic persecution but as a natural step in the maturing of their class consciousness.

This idea had very little to do with the truth about the political convictions of the Bulgarian Jews. It is well established that during the interwar years Bulgarian Jews identified strongly with Zionist ideas and less with socialism of any kind. This is not to say that Zionism was the only movement of the Bulgarian Jews. Jewish life in Bulgaria before the Second World War was quite diverse. But on balance, Jewish nationalism claiming that Jews should strive towards the establishment of their own nation-state

¹⁸ Kiril Vasilev (ed.), Istoria na Antifashistkata Borba v Bulgaria 1939/1944: Septemvri 1939 - fevruari 1943, (Sofia: Partizdat, 1976), vol. I.

based on Jewish ethnicity and culture, as opposed to communism based on political statehood, was the most popular political idea among the Bulgarian Jews. After Bulgarian independence both Zionism and socialism tried to develop a systematic concept about the Jewish identity. The central issue was what Jews should choose: integration in the new Bulgarian society or departure for Palestine.¹⁹

At the beginning of the 20th century, Zionism was uniquely popular among the Bulgarian Jews: 'In difference to the rest of the Balkan countries, Zionism in Bulgaria blended very well with the community life and became its centre. It became the political creed of the Bulgarian Jewry.'²⁰ Zionism overshadowed the activities of the Alliance Israelite Universel (AIU), which was an organisation created to alter obscurantist Jewish thought after the model of the enlightened western Jewish communities.²¹ In Bulgaria the attempts of the AIU to substitute the original language Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) of the Bulgarian Jews with French as the common language among all Jews were less successful than in any other Balkan country. Chary argues that this was one of the main features of the Bulgarian Jews, which set them apart from the rest of the Balkan Jewish communities. He states that in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman empire a 'new generation

¹⁹ Zionism was the Jewish nationalist movement that has had as its goal the creation and support of a Jewish national state in Palestine, the ancient homeland of the Jews (Hebrew: Eretz Yisra'el, 'the Land of Israel'). Though Zionism originated in Eastern and Central Europe in the latter part of the 19th century, it is in many ways a continuation of the ancient nationalist attachment of the Jews.

²⁰ See Benbassa and Rodrigue, The Jews of the Balkans, p.152.

²¹ AIU was founded in Paris in 1860 and its first schools in the Balkans were opened shortly afterwards: in Edrine in 1867 and in Shumla (today's Shumen, Bulgaria) in 1870. The Alliance also opened branches in Istanbul, Izmir and Thessaloniki (Salonica) in 1870. It taught in the spirit of upward social mobility and supported mass education in one language. See Benbassa and Rodrigue, The Jews of the Balkans, 1995.

of post-Ottoman Francophile Jews emerged in the Balkans, but not in Bulgaria'.²² One of the reasons Zionism seemed preferable to the Bulgarian Jews was that it offered identification both with democratic equality and Jewish unity. Most importantly Zionism corresponded with the nationalist upsurge in the entire Balkan region. The unity of the nation was the main goal of all Balkan people. This made many of the members of the minorities very aware that national identity was to be the heart of the new societies. As a result they had to find a way to fit into this concept of the nation-state. The so-called 'third Jewish generation' responded to Bulgarian nationalism with Zionism.²³ For the Jews the starting point was to clarify their own national feelings. Was there a Jewish nationality and which nation did Jews belong? Zionism's strength gave clear answers to such questions. At the eve of the Second World War there were 30 Zionist societies. The Bulgarian Zionist Federation, which served as an umbrella organisation for all Zionist activities was established around 1898 and sustained until 1942.²⁴ Bulgarian Jews saw Zionism as the most modern theory of Jewish identity and certainly hoped that it would give clarity to the rather confused life after the collapse of the Ottoman empire. This led to an exceptional Zionist vitality in Bulgaria.²⁵ Jewish periodicals and the press in Bulgaria illustrates the prevailing Zionist orientation in the country. Between 1897 and 1948 there were 228 papers published, the majority of them were Zionist. The organ of the Zionist Federation was *Hasofar* (Trumpet), which was published in Plovdiv in Ladino and/or Bulgarian with interruptions between 1901-41 and between 1944-48 transformed into

²² See Chary, The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution 1940-1944, p. 30.

²³ Ibid., p.30. Chary also observes that there were three generations of Jews in the pre-war Bulgaria: the old Sephardim who had grown up in Ottoman obscurantism, the westernised AIU educated second generation and the Zionist Jewish nationalist, who were the third generation.

²⁴ Benbassa and Rodrigue, The Jews of the Balkans, p. 151.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 151-153.

Zionistka Tribuna (Zionist Tribune). Among these who lasted longer were *El Dia* (The Day) 1898-1910 published in Plovdiv, *Jevreiski Glas: Nezavisim Zionisticheski Vestnik* (Jewish Voice: Independent Zionist Newspaper), Sofia, 1924-26, *Jevreiska Tribuna* (Jewish Tribune) in Russe, 1926-29, *El Judio* (The Jew), 1925-29 in Sofia and Varna, *Hafikvah* (The Hope) in Sofia, 1928-31.²⁶ Benbassa goes as far as to call Bulgaria 'the motherland of institutionalised Zionism'.²⁷ Zionism, he says was winning the competition among Zionists, socialists and communists.²⁸ For Zionism promised one language, equal opportunities and above all united national unity - all the features associated with the new times in the Balkans.

In addition to the fact that no single developed international commercial or cultural Jewish centre such as Thessaloniki remained in the new Bulgarian territories must have prompted a desire to find a new focus for the community's life. The question what language Bulgarian Jews should speak was also subject to debate. Language was seen as the main criteria for the Jewish adaptation after the Ottoman *millet* was dismantled. Language difference complicated the public life of the Balkan Sephardim in the independent nation-states, where linguistic affiliation was becoming one of the specific

²⁶ Data gathered at the National Library 'Cyril and Methodius' (NBKM), Sofia, Bulgaria, 1997.

²⁷ See Benbassa and Rodrigue, The Jews of the Balkans, p.153.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 90-93. According to his data the socialist organisation Poalei Zion, founded in Plovdiv in 1910 with its paper *Probudá*, was the largest organisation in the years between 1944-48 with around 7,000 members. In 1924 the revisionist Zionism and youth was organised into the Democratic Zionist Activist Group with leader Benjamin Arditi. In the 1930s the revisionists and Poalei Zion left the Zionist Federation. There was also a religious Zionist movement, 'Mizrahi' which was founded in 1935 but it did not live very long.

characteristics of Balkan nationalism.²⁹ Jews were speaking many languages, but were not really prepared for life in monolingual national cultures. During the 1920s Zionists introduced Hebrew as the second language equal to Bulgarian. In effect this meant that Jews accepted that Bulgarian was to be their language of public communication and Hebrew their national language. This is why the educational reform of 1934, which was discussed in relation to the Turkish minority in chapter 4 of this thesis, was the most significant factor introduced by the Bulgarian state. The introduction of Bulgarian language as the main language of education in all schools greatly encouraged the usage of Bulgarian language in all spheres of life. The political changes in 1934 were critical to the level of the Jewish participation in socialist life in Bulgaria. The then Bulgarian government's anti-democratic policies seriously damaged the democratic process in the country and socialist oriented Zionism withdrew from public life.³⁰ Those Jews who adhered to socialist ideas of any type were very vulnerable and many opted to stay on the safe side by being simply Zionists rather than socialist minded Zionists.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 89.

³⁰ The reform was carried by the government of the colonels Damian Velchev and Kimon Georgiev, which came into power in Bulgaria after a *coup d'etat* on 19 May 1934.

IX. Bulgarian Jewish Socialist Tradition in Bulgaria

Before the Second World War many Bulgarian Jews supported socialism in a broad sense. But it was far from being the only political movement associated with Jews. Most developed their ideas within the Zionist movement and argued for revising Zionism to incorporate socialism rather than rejecting it. They tended to support the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (the so called '*broad socialists*' as opposed to the '*narrow socialists*', which later became the core of the Bulgarian communist party). Socialist-oriented Zionists favoured the introduction of Bulgarian language for general purposes and for the restriction of Hebrew to religious practices. While mainstream Zionists spoke about the exclusivity of the Jewish nation, socialists saw integration into Bulgarian mainstream society as a way to protect Jewish culture. There were Jewish sections in the Bulgarian socialist party at the beginning of the century, consisting mainly of typographers and intellectuals in the cities. There were also socialist newspapers: *Evreiski rabotnik* ('The Jewish Worker'), Sofia, 1910-32 with an interruption between 1924 -31, *El Pueblo* ('The People'), Sofia, 1902-03, *Evreiska misul* ('Jewish Thought'), Sofia, April 1936-August 1936.³¹

The dynamics between the left and the right in the Jewish community were quite complex. The Jewish left was primarily oriented towards the ideas of social-democracy rather than Marxism. Moreover Zionism was not simply a right-wing individualist ideology but was strongly associated with ideas of equality and Jewish community unity . To an extent settling in Palestine was seen as a step towards building socialism, understood broadly as Jewish community-orientated life. Some of Jewish left

³¹ Data gathered at the National Bulgarian Library 'Cyril and Methodius' (NBKM), Sofia, Bulgaria, 1997.

publications supported Zionist ideas (*Evreiski Rabotnic* and *Probudá*) and did not feel that they necessarily contradicted socialist movement in Bulgaria. In another words, Jewish socialism was not a rejection of ethnic Jewish nationalism striving towards Jewish independence in Palestine.

The main question in the interaction between the Bulgarian and Jewish socialism was whether the Jewish and the Bulgarian left movements should be kept separately or fuse.

Parousheva claims that Jews did not take part in the original Bulgarian socialist movement and in the communist party. She asserts: 'The question was whether there should be Jews in the Bulgarian socialist party or simply Jewish socialists in the Zionist movement.'³² It was as important for Jews to decide whether in the name of socialist ideals they should merge with their Bulgarian fellows, as it was for the Bulgarians to know whether they could sympathise with Jews' Zionist ideals. At a time when Bulgarian communists were outlawed, Jews did not participate in significant numbers although very few held important positions in the Bulgarian communist party ranks.³³

³² Dobrina Parousheva, 'Social Democracy and the Jewish Working Class in Bulgaria (late 19th and early 20th century)' in *Annual*, 'Shalom', vol. XXVII, (1993/94), p. 71.

³³ Chary estimates that Jews made up 4 per cent or 400 members of a total of 10,000 partisans in Bulgaria, and that there were 70 Jews killed in the underground movement.

X. 'Who Saved the Bulgarian Jews?'

Bulgaria has been very proud that during the Second World War no Jews from Bulgaria proper were sent to the death camps. The question about why this was so has dominated Jewish politics in Bulgaria ever since. This research looks at the controversies surrounding the debate and focuses on the answer which was given during communism. The Bulgarian communist regime claimed that the saving of the Bulgarian Jews was a unique act, comparable only to the saving of the Jews in Denmark. Most importantly it asserted that the BCP, with the help of the Red Army, averted the deportations to the death camps, planned by the Germans and supported by the Bulgarian government. This claim aimed to glorify the Bulgarian communist movement during the Second World War. Bulgarian communism also postulated that it was primarily class conflict, not ethnic persecution, which motivated the Bulgarian Jews to join the resistance. It was also underlined that Jewish persecution during the war was not harsher than the persecution suffered by the communists.³⁴ This communist version of events of the history of Bulgarian Jewry aimed to strengthen the legitimacy of communism as a morally just system. Things were clear - capitalists persecuted the Jews and communists rescued them. But this simple statement gave a very insufficient answer to the very complicated question of how the Bulgarian Jewish community survived.

First, a major clarification has to be made about the very definition of who actually were the Bulgarian Jews in the communist version of history. The communist theory about the saving of the Bulgarian Jews was based on the definition of the Bulgarian Jews as the Jews living in Bulgaria proper. The Jews living in the territories occupied by Bulgaria in Macedonia and Thrace were excluded from this definition. The Jews from these so called

‘occupied territories’ were sent to the concentration camps. Bulgarian communists claimed that this was not a ‘Bulgarian’ matter - because these lands were not ‘Bulgaria proper’. In 1943, about 12,000 Jews were deported from the occupied territories of Macedonia and Thrace to Poland.³⁵ During the war, communists argued, Bulgaria was occupied by the Germans and was under their control. Accordingly Bulgaria had to comply with the German demands for the extermination of the Jews because they had very little say when it came to the ‘occupied territories’. The question about the Jews living in Bulgaria proper was treated from a different perspective. The communist opinion was that there the communist movement supported by the Bulgarian people and by part of the Bulgarian elite saved the Jews. The communist teaching was that the BCP led the anti-fascist resistance, which saved the Jews. Internally, the driving force was the peasant-workers alliance, guided by the BCP. The main outside factor was the co-ordinated international communist movement and the consequent intervention of the Red Army. Jewish participation in the resistance was reduced to a minimum in this communist theory. But also very importantly, if acknowledged at all, it was said that Jews took part in the communist movement, not because of the ethnic persecution they suffered, but because of their class identity and class-minded thinking. The communist formula was that the anti-fascist resistance equalled the struggle against capitalism and imperialism and the persecution of the Jews simply part of it. Todor Zhivkov himself stated that he personally organised the Sofia demonstration in protest to the plan to deport the Jews in May 1943: ‘It is true that many Bulgarian Jews perished during those terrible years. But none of them perished only because of being Jews. Bulgarians and

³⁴ See Vasilev, Istoria na Antifashistkata Borba v Bulgaria, 1976.

³⁵ See Parousheva, ‘Social Democracy and the Jewish Working Class in Bulgaria, p. 71.

Bulgarian citizens of Jewish and other origins struggled together against fascism and sacrificed their life for the liberty of their mother-country, for socialist Bulgaria.³⁶

However the question about the Jews of the 'occupied territories' was central to the confusions in the communist claim. This problem, like everything relating to Macedonia, was connected to the ideas of Bulgarian nationalism. December 1941 Bulgaria joined the Pact (Italy, Germany, Japan) and declared war on the Western Allies. Soon afterwards Bulgaria occupied Macedonia and Thrace. Although the boundaries of the new territories and the ownership of the new lands were not fully established, Bulgarians were excited over the gains. The communist ideology and historiography in general ascribed the occupation to the nationalist ambitions of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie. But why Bulgarian communists did not fight for saving the Jews in the occupied territories if according to their own theory they supported the international anti-Hitlerist struggle? In this case it seemed only too convenient to state that neither the Bulgarian communists nor the Bulgarian public had any say over the Jewish faith in the 'occupied territories'.

Communism did not deny the deportations from the occupied territories in Macedonia and Thrace. But in general, the topic was avoided as much as possible. Later, in its efforts to describe the Second World War as an imperialist war, communism ignored the Holocaust and spoke only about the 'anti-fascist fighters' (*bortzi antifashisti*) who died in the camps. It was also argued that because Jews in the 'occupied territories' were either Yugoslav or Greek citizens the Bulgarian authorities could give up on them much more easily. At the same time it was underlined that the Bulgarian administration in Macedonia and Thrace succumbed to Hitler's pressure. In short, communism saved the Jews in

³⁶ Todor Zhivkov. Foreword. By Albert Cohen and Anri Assa, Saving the Jews in Bulgaria 1941-1944, (Sofia: State Publishing House 'Septemvri', 1977).

Bulgaria and the pro-Nazi Bulgarian bourgeoisie alone bore responsibility for the extermination of the Jews from Macedonia and Thrace.

The communist interpretation added that along with the leading role of the communist party in the resistance, Bulgarian Jews were also saved by the traditional lack of anti-Semitic feeling in Bulgaria. This was not an unfounded claim. The relationship between the Bulgarian nation and the Jewish ethnic minority during the Second World War may be described as non-mobilised in an anti-Semitic fashion and non-active on a mass level. The observation of the lack of intensive anti-Semitism among the Bulgarian population during the Nazi time was quite accurate. Almog compares Bulgaria with Italy and concludes that in a similar fashion Bulgarian public opinion was not won by the Nazis. He believes that the main reason for this was that both Bulgaria and Italy had relatively small Jewish populations, which were not particularly distinctive in social or economic terms. Almog thinks that Jews were considered a legitimate part of the Bulgarian nation and therefore anti-Semitism did not resonate so much with ordinary people in everyday life.³⁷ Yet Holocaust history questions whether outspoken anti-Semitism was a necessary condition for the extermination of the Jews.³⁸ Communism emphasised the individual psychology and the almost mystical qualities of the Bulgarian cultural national character, which saved the Jews during the Second World War. There was very little analysis of the actual events and the complicated play of political factors behind the scenes. Grinberg gives a very detailed account of the logistics of the Jewish internment in Bulgaria proper as well as the logistics of the Jewish deportations from Macedonia and Thrace and the

³⁷ See Shmuel Almog, Nationalism and Antisemitism in Modern Europe 1815-1945, (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem: Pergamon Press, 1990), p.127.

³⁸ See Zygmunt Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust, (Great Britain: Polity Press, 1989), p. 31.

involvement of the Bulgarian administration in it. His book was published in the immediate aftermath of the war. But it was never reprinted or referred to as a source of information in communist historiography.³⁹ Grinberg claimed that the lack of mobilised anti-Semitism on a mass scale was not a sufficient factor on its own to prevent the deportations of the Jews from the territories occupied by Bulgaria. He also describes how the Jews from Macedonia and Thrace were deported by trains which received the official permission to pass through Bulgaria proper. Grinberg however does not deny that the saving of the Jews from Bulgaria proper was a great achievement of Bulgaria.

Communism saw the Jewish question in Bulgaria as part of the myth of Bulgarian tolerance, rooted in the myth of the long years of suffering under the Turkish rule, and the lack of reactionary native aristocracy. The formula of Marxism-Leninism was also used to justify this attitude. Benvenisti summarised that in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism, in Bulgaria, people possess an 'international psyche' and there are no social differences between the ethnic groups. To be precise he meant that Bulgarian people did not discriminate ethnic minorities in general because they all belonged to the same class. Benvenisti stated that the great national revolutionary Bulgarian tradition as well as the weak religious feelings of the Bulgarians contributed to the success of the resistance.⁴⁰ Interestingly many communist books acknowledged the role of the Bulgarian church in saving the Bulgarian Jews. Although religious institutions were not supposed to have played a positive role in the Bulgarian society, according to the communist ideology, it

³⁹ See Natan Grinberg, *Documenti*, (Sofia: The Central Consistory of the Bulgarian Jews, 1945).

⁴⁰ David Benvenisti, 'Niakoi problemi otnosno prichinite za spasiavaneto na bulgariskite evrei ot lagerite na smurta: Kum 25-godishninata ot socialisticheskata revolutsia v Bulgaria' in *Godishnik*, Obshtestvena Kulturno-Prosvetna Organizatsia na Evreite v Narodna Republika Bulgaria: Centralno Rukovodstvo, 1969, vol. IV.

was said that the Bulgarian church was a significant factor in the resistance to deportations.⁴¹

The BCP was declared the rescuer of the Jews, just as it was the saviour of Bulgaria as a whole. The communist myth also tried to de-ethnicise the Jewish persecution in Bulgaria by stating that Jews were in danger because they were poor and socialists, not because of their ethnicity. This was the communist answer to the question 'who saved the Bulgarian Jews'. Although there were some disagreements on this interpretation among the Jewish community in Bulgaria, in general it was not challenged until 1989. At the same time the real strength of the BCP during the Second World War has been a subject of debate.

BCP was outlawed after the 1923 uprising in Bulgaria and since then acting as an underground opposition. Chary believes that it was quite powerful, strongly connected with the Soviets but consisting primarily of Bulgarian nationals: 'The Russian connection with Bolshevism was an aid rather than a drawback to the party in Bulgaria and, there being no really serious minority problem in the country, the party was distinguished in Eastern Europe because its membership included a high percentage of Bulgarian nationals rather than disgruntled members of minorities.'⁴² However Chary also thinks that the two main factors which prevented the Jewish deportations were the protests of the Bulgarian community and the increased victories of the Allies. The combination of the two sustained the government decision not to hand the Jews over to the Nazis.⁴³ To the contrary Oren thinks that there was a relatively high number of Jews in the Bulgarian partisan movement.⁴⁴ Similarly to him Krispin asserts that the participation of the Jews in

⁴¹ See Cohen and Assa, Saving the Jews, chapter 5.

⁴² Chary, The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution, p. 6.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 155.

⁴⁴ See Nissan Oren, The Bulgarian Communist Party 1934-1944, (New York: Columbia

the Bulgarian resistance was considerable: 260 guerrillas, 460 political prisoners and 1,000 detained in concentration camps as politically suspicious persons as well as many others who were involved in the underground activities but not recruited by partisan's groups.⁴⁵

The debate about the level of active Jewish participation in the communist movement was not so important for the BCP. What really mattered from the communist point of view was their motivation. The communist myth was not about Jewish performance in the communist movement but more about the national uniqueness of the Bulgarian people, who saved their lives. Benvenisti argues that Bulgarians and Jews were brothers in the BCP, a tolerant party of international character due to its leaders' education in the Soviet Union and because 'Bulgarians are made out of a special substance', which does not discriminate.⁴⁶ Dimitrov underlined the role the entire Bulgarian society played, led by the BCP, suggesting that the 'deeply rooted humanism' of the Bulgarian people saved the Jews.⁴⁷

Communist mythology had to compete with another strong myth about the saving of the Bulgarian Jews. This was the myth about the Bulgarian monarch, Boris III, who was believed to have saved the Bulgarian Jews by outmanoeuvring the German authorities.

University Press, 1960), p. 274.

⁴⁵ See Alfred Krispin, 'A Closely Kept Secret' in *Human Rights Without Frontiers: European Magazine of Human Rights*, Special Issue: Judaism. A Moral Code or Sense of Belonging, (droits de l'Homme sans Frontiers, 1997), p. 18.

⁴⁶ Benvenisti, 'Niakoi problemi otnosno prichinite za spasiavaneto na bulgariskite evrei ot lagerite na smurta', p. 86.

⁴⁷ See Supplement of the Archives: Round table 'The saving of the Bulgarian Jews 1941-1944' in *Godishnik*, 1989, vol. XXIV.

The communist myth opposed the role of the Bulgarian king in the events. Boris died in August 1943 and there were speculations, never proven, that he paid with his life for the refusal to deport the Jews from Bulgaria. This was impossible to verify and Boris was mythologised as the defender of the nation and a saviour of the Bulgarian Jews. Communist historiography however condemned the role of the king as pro-German.⁴⁸ Communism offered an alternative personality to the monarch - Todor Zhivkov, at the time a young communist activist in Sofia. The head of the BCP and the Bulgarian communist state Zhivkov was held as the main hero in the saving of the Bulgarian Jews. Zhivkov claimed personal responsibility for the Sofia demonstration on 24 May 1943, which was the high-point in the communist resistance.⁴⁹ The Bulgarian king was labelled a reactionary monarch, while Zhivkov, proclaimed as the protector of the Jews. The same year, when the Jews from Macedonia and Thrace were deported, Bulgarian authorities attempted to prepare the deportation of the Jews living within Bulgaria proper and 25,000 Jews from Sofia were resettled in the provinces as a part of this preparation. This fact was kept silent under communism because of the controversial intricacies of the events which evolved after the communists took power in 1944.

⁴⁸ See Cohen and Assa, Saving the Jews in Bulgaria, chapter 8.

⁴⁹ See Zhivkov. Foreword. By Cohen and Assa, Saving the Jews in Bulgaria, 1977.

XI. The Exodus of the Bulgarian Jews (1947-49)

Between 1947-49 most of the Bulgarian Jews emigrated to Israel. The departure of about 43,000-46,000 Jews, of a total population of around 50,000, was authorised by the Bulgarian communist government. The Jewish emigration was a result of the complex interaction of internal and external political and economical factors after the end of the Second World War. In 1944 communism came to power in Bulgaria and found that the Jewish community preserved though it was dispersed and shattered by the events of the war. The two major results of the war, which affected the Jewish communities everywhere in Europe, was the Holocaust and the call for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. The majority of Bulgarian Jews with their traditional Zionist orientation felt that it was both their duty and also their chance to begin a new life in Israel. But there was also another factor, which encouraged their departure. This was the course of Jewish restitution in Bulgaria. The law governing the return of property owned by the state was passed in November 1946. Bulgaria was devastated, there was chaos, poverty and disorientation among the population, which the authorities could not cope with. Many of the Sofia Jews who returned from the provinces and the labour camps found new occupiers in their houses. According to the law Jewish refugees who left Bulgaria could not claim back anything after March 1946. This regulation was applied regardless of their ideological orientation. Basically Jews had very little to lose. Above all the horrifying revelations about the Holocaust gave the sense that it was better for the Jews to protect themselves by building a state of their own.

Apart from this, three specific factors facilitated the Jewish emigration. Their analysis aims to define the communist policy to the Jewish question after the war: 1) the role of

the Soviet Union, 2) the position of BCP, and 3) the general opinion of the Bulgarian society towards the Jewish question.

After the war the USSR's policy was dictated by the rivalry over who was to control the Palestinian issue. At that time the Soviets supported Jewish emigration to Palestine. In accord with Marxist-Leninist thought, the idea was that the Jewish problem may be solved only by world-wide democratisation. The creation of a communist-orientated state in the Middle East would be a major contribution to this process. At the same time official Soviet ideology claimed that anti-Semitism and the consequent destruction of the Jewish communities in Europe was a feature of world imperialism. The new communist order would therefore offer the perfect place for the new Jewish life. Emigration from the new people's democracies was thus not officially encouraged but unofficially favoured.⁵⁰ The Bulgarian communist leadership being particularly close to the Soviets, did not deviate from this essentially contradictory line. On the one hand Jews were supposed to be happiest in the new Bulgarian communist state because it was free from prejudice. On the other, Jews should actually go and build the new Jewish state somewhere else. The main concern of the new Bulgarian communist government was how to escape international monitoring while dealing with Jewish matters. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1946, supported by the Central Consistory, it made an agreement with the World Jewish Congress not to provide special provisions for the defence of the Jews in Bulgaria because there was no real need as everything was going well.⁵¹ In fact the lack of outside monitors was the perfect condition for the Bulgarians to feel free to do

⁵⁰ See Iurii Strizhov, 'The Soviet Position on the establishment of the State of Israel' in Yaacov Ro'I (ed.), Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union, (Great Britain: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1995), pp. 313 -314.

⁵¹ See Christo Boyadjieff, Saving the Bulgarian Jews in World War II, (Ottawa: Free

whatever they wished. Jewish organisations also had nowhere to direct their complaints. Meyer observes that even while the discussion went about a potential outside monitoring body in Bulgaria responsible for Jewish matters, the Jewish schools in Bulgaria were beginning to be closed down and the Jewish organisations, already dominated by the communists, could not complain about the Bulgarian laws on restitution, which were highly unfavourable to them.⁵² Zionist organisations in Bulgaria were maintained until 1948 with some degree of independence, but after the bulk of the resettlement was completed they were closed, soon after 1949. Chary argues that apart from the Soviet policy, which dictated relations to Israel in the communist bloc, the BCP gave permission to the Bulgarian Jews to leave for two reasons: the government did not have to return Jewish property which was confiscated during the war, and Jewish emigration facilitated the communist programme for the establishment of a 'homogenous Bulgarian citizenry'.⁵³ Jews seemed an additional burden for post-war Bulgaria.⁵⁴ Their mass resettlement relived the Bulgarian government from the responsibility to provide for them.

Bulgarian Center, 1989), p. 133.

⁵² See Peter Meyer, Bernard D. Weinrub, Eugene Dushinsky and Nicolas Sylvan, The Jews in the Soviet Satelites, (The Americal Jewish Committee: Syracuse University Press, 1953).

⁵³ Chary, The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution, p. 182.

⁵⁴ As early as 1944 David Ben Gurion visited Bulgaria for negotiations over the Jewish resettlement to Palestine. Also Israel arranged and helped in the transport expenses for the Jewish emigration from Bulgaria. There is little doubt that the decision taken by Dimitrov to allow the Jews to leave en mass was approved by the Soviets. The fact that there were not many Jewish activists in the communist party and particularly in the high ranks must have also helped the Zionist cause. The combination of these factors speeded up the emigration matters significantly.

Also the lack of international monitoring made it possible for the Bulgarian courts to proceed with Jewish affairs as they liked. The anti-Semitic legislators and policy-makers in Bulgaria were tried together with all governmental officials, ministers, king's advisors, intellectuals and professionals, in 1946, at the so-called People's Court. Also tried were anti-Semitic writers and liquidators of Jewish property. Several officials were sentenced in absentia.⁵⁵ But in general, the court found irrelevant defence of the Jews, if presented as an evidence in court.⁵⁶ The communist idea was to destroy any possible opponents to power, not to investigate political anti-Semitism.

In general the Bulgarian public had no opinion on Jewish emigration. It was thought to be a Jewish problem, which had very little to do with the future of the Bulgarian country. Although there is little doubt that Bulgarian public opinion was against the deportation of the Jews, after the war Jewish faith was not a subject of a serious debate among the Bulgarians. The restitution laws made it easier for those Bulgarians who took over the Jewish flats and houses to stay where they were. Before leaving Jews sold their property at low prices because of the various restrictions which were imposed on them and because of the pressure of time. The new inhabitants of the Jewish properties were Bulgarians. This was particularly felt in the capital, Sofia, where entire blocks of flats were emptied and sold out within a couple of years. Jewish life disappeared from central Sofia

⁵⁵ See Chary, The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution, p.179. His list includes the names of Alexander Belev, Boris Tashev, Spas Stoianchevski, Marko Mehdemov. Executed for war crimes were 26 ministers and king's advisors, 66 members of the Parliament and many intellectuals and professionals.

⁵⁶ See Chary, The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution, p. 180. Dimitur Peshev escaped death although his defence of the Jews was made irrelevant during the trial. However his solicitor, Josef Iasharof, who succeeded in saving his life was Jewish.

where before the exodus it had been was one of its distinct features, including the largest synagogue in the Balkans.

The emigration issue divided and confused the Bulgarian Jewish community. Those who were leaving were labelled traitors by those who decided to stay. The problems in emigrating were blamed on the Zionist organisations, which encouraged emigration but could not always secure safe departure and travel.⁵⁷ At the same time the Jewish press with socialist orientation expressed gratitude to the first Bulgarian communist leader, Dimitrov, who gave the final and official permission for the emigration after consultations with Moscow. After the emigration to Palestine, the Jewish presence in the country was minimal. It remained concentrated in the big cities and amounted to 5,000-7,000 at most. As a result of the exodus the very character of the Bulgarian Jewish community changed from dedicated Zionist to strongly pro-communist. The overwhelming majority of those who stayed had a strong socialist orientation and believed that communism was going to solve the Jewish question once and forever. There was one additional consequence of the Jewish emigration from Bulgaria. By permitting and in fact encouraging the exodus, communism relieved the Bulgarian nation from the responsibility of reflecting on the past and the future of one of their minorities. Once the people were not there it was much easier to forget or ignore what happened. The Jewish culture and history became central theme of the post-war reconstruction of western Europe whereas in Bulgaria they were largely non-existent.

⁵⁷ The Jewish press at the time reported that to a great extent emigration to Israel was an expression of Zionism and an adventure. Jewish tradesmen were called 'parasites', 'unhealthy, anti-Fatherland front's element'. On the international front the subject of anti-Semitism in America was introduced by the new communist press. It was declared that in the People's Republic of Bulgaria, there can be no anti-Semitism.

XII. The New Definition of Jewish Identity Under Communism

The central question concerning Jewish life under communism was what constituted Jewish identity in socialist Bulgaria. The BCP decided the limits of Jewishness, while at the same time Bulgarian Jews sought to maintain their own definition of their own cultural identity. Communists' main demand was that Bulgarian Jews had to differentiate from the rest of the Jews in the world as ethnically different from them, and particularly from the Israeli Jews. The emphasis on the differentiation from Israel's Jews was firmly established after the Israeli-Arab war in 1967.⁵⁸ According to this definition Bulgarian Jews were disconnected ethnically from other Jews although their relationships with relatives in Israel were accepted but strictly controlled. The main aim of this perception was the assimilation of the Jews into the ethnic Bulgarian nation. Once declared a group with no ethnic ties to anybody else it was much easier to promote policies based on this idea. Also the Bulgarian communist policy towards the Jews continued to depend on Soviet politics in the Middle East. During the years of the cold war, the initial support of the Soviet Union for Jewish settlement in Palestine shifted towards open hostility to Israel and friendliness to the Arab countries. Relations between Israel and the countries in the Soviet bloc, including Bulgaria, were severed after the Israeli-Arab war in 1967. This had a major impact on the position of Jews in Bulgarian society.

⁵⁸ See Meyer, The Jews in the Soviet Satelites, 1953. He reported that in January 1948 at a meeting of the Central Jewish Committee of the Fatherland Front it was announced that the Bulgarian Jewry was independent of all international Jewish or Zionist organisations. It was underlined that Bulgarians of Jewish origin have nothing to do with Jews in Palestine or the USA.

XIII. Jewish Education

The Bulgarian communist policy on Jewish assimilation aimed to make Jews as invisible as possible in the society. The actual process of assimilation developed in several stages. First Jewish educational and community institutions were gradually closed. Second Jewish culture, language and history were to be incorporated into the Bulgarian cultural national tradition through a new type of cultural Jewish studies. The aim was to prove that Bulgaria was culturally and ethnically a homogenous country and there was no Jewish culture as a separate entity based on Jewish ethnicity. In order to do this, Jewish culture was declared irrelevant to the Bulgarian Jews themselves. The main recommendation was to forget it altogether. Jewish schools were abolished in 1943 and restored in 1944, after the end of the war. Some new ones were even opened at this time. But by 1949 most of them were closed.⁵⁹ Bulgarian authorities claimed that the Jewish community itself supported the closures because of the insufficient numbers of pupils. This was far from the actual desires of many members of the Bulgarian Jewish community. Jews did not want their educational institutions closed, but they could not meet the communist requirements according to which they had to be transformed. The main content of the teaching was supposed to be about Marxism-Leninism in relation to communist propaganda about Israel. This required declaring disapproval of everything connected to Israel and acceptance of everything Bulgarian. As a result, many Jews, particularly the younger generation, wanted to join mainstream Bulgarian life, since as Jews they were constantly asked to declare exclusive loyalty to the regime.

Jewish institutions were also assimilated into the mainstream organs of Bulgarian socialism. The Jewish Polyclinic was turned into a general one. The Jewish Club and the

Jewish Choir in Sofia were accused of being Zionists and kept under constant pressure. The Jewish Drama Circle was faced with similar allegations and was ordered to 'clean the repertoire from any Israel style content'.⁶⁰ The Sofia synagogue, which was closed during 1943-44 and had its Judaica library destroyed during the bombing in 1944, was kept closed for most of the time under the communist regime with the pretext of being under renovation.⁶¹ In fact the communist government planned to turn it into a concert hall but the Jewish community was opposed and managed to prevent it.⁶² The faith of other synagogues in the country was similar. Synagogues were never destroyed as brutally as some of the mosques in Bulgaria, but in effect, during the entire period of communism there were no active places of Jewish worship in the country. As a result Jewish religion became a marginal subject of very obscure interest. Jewish holidays were increasingly kept as family tradition and denied public space. The Consistory, the religious body of the community, was under the total control of the BCP and actually helped the authorities observe the life of the Jewish community. The regime tried to substitute the old religious and cultural institutions with new communist style organisations. This idea was to be implemented by the leading Jewish communists themselves. In 1957 the Jewish Cultural Association was founded. Joseph Astrukov formulated the main tasks: to fight Zionism and to be 'active agitators and propagandists for socialism in our country'.⁶³ According to Astrukov, who delivered a speech at the opening, new socialist and Bulgarian concept of Jewish identity was formulated: 'One cannot speak of a Jewish nation in general. Jews live a common economic, political and cultural life in the midst of

⁵⁹See Minority Groups in Bulgaria in a Human Rights Context, (Sofia, 1994), p. 54.

⁶⁰ RFE, 2896/June 1958.

⁶¹ The Central Synagogue of Sofia was officially opened on 9 September 1909.

⁶² Stephen Mark Mallinger, A Brief Introduction to the Jewish Community of Bulgaria, (Sofia: RIVA Books, 1996), p. 34.

⁶³ RFE Report, 2478/June 1959.

other nations. For this reason the Jews draw close to these nations and adopt their culture...The question relating to the Jewish population in Israel is quite different. There a Jewish nation is now in the process of formation. The Jews in other countries do not belong to this nation...Do the Jews in Bulgaria have their own language, their own dances, literature, art, etc. which express an independent national Jewish culture in Bulgaria? Such a thing does not exist. Therefore none say seriously that Jews in Bulgaria have their own national culture... *Incorporation must not be interpreted as assimilation, the obliteration of national differences, the suppression or disregard of the national peculiarities of their way of life and customs, etc. The party has not set itself such a task and can not set it.*' (emphasis added) ⁶⁴

This statement illustrates two things: that Jewish identity in Bulgaria was understood in Stalinist terms and that the BCP was not going to state publicly the promotion of Jewish cultural assimilation in Bulgaria.

⁶⁴ Ibid. pp. 3-4, (emphasis added).

XIV. The Fate of the Jewish Research Institute

The most telling story about the marginalisation of Jewish culture was in communist Bulgaria was the closure of the Jewish Research Institute (JRI). It shows how the communist policy of Jewish assimilation operated without ever been made official.⁶⁵ The idea for this institution dated back to 1947, when it was still debatable whether the community would stay or emigrate. The key figures were Eli Ashkenazi, a lawyer, and Rabbi Dr. Asher Hananel. The aims of the JRI were to collect various sources and books on Jewish history, to publish an annual periodical, to collect Bulgarian Jewish folklore and to establish a Jewish museum in Bulgaria. After a debate within the Jewish community whether there was need for such an institute, and whether it was an appropriate use of money, Ashkenazi and Hananel requested to have the JRI as an attachment to the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAN). This was refused on the grounds that priority had to be given to Bulgarian studies. The official respond of the BAN was as follows: 'Is it really so urgent to examine the history of the Jewish community in Bulgaria and establish a special section for this purpose alongside with the sections for Medieval and Modern Bulgarian History?' ⁶⁶ Eventually the JRI was set up as a part of the Department of Bulgarian Byzantine and Oriental Studies. The institute function as a research centre, but its objectives were defined as researching the Jewish civilisation *in connection* to the Bulgarian national culture after the independence of 1878. Jewish scholars were considered 'neither experts nor methodologically qualified.' They

⁶⁵ See David B. Cohen, 'The Jewish Research Institute' in *Godishnik*, (Sofia: 1995), vol. XXVIII. His account of the factual history of the JRI is very detailed. This research considers the article to be the main written source of information about JRI, though the full reconstruction of the events was supplemented with information gathered by personal conversations in Sofia, 1997.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 173.

were criticised for being too immersed into the past and not sufficiently Marxist.⁶⁷ In 1964 Ashkenazi retired and Hananel, after being tried for mishandling of state property, died. The department survived until 1974 when it was closed.⁶⁸ The end of the JRI was practically also the end of Jewish scholarship in communist Bulgaria. The gradual marginalisation and discouragement which the institution and its members experienced illustrated the communist policy not only in the sphere of scholarly interest but also in Jewish matters in general.

After the construction of impossible conditions for sustaining the activities of JRI the very sense of its purpose was questioned. Since it was declared that Jews had no separate or different in any way history, it was also postulated that there was no need to enquire further into the matter.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 176.

⁶⁸ Two major projects were not realised: the proposal for Modern History of the Jewish Community in Bulgaria and the publication of Judeo-Spanish-Bulgarian Dictionary and 'Jewish Proverbs and Sayings', both scripted by Isaak Moskona. In 1979 the Jewish collection was handed over to the Central State Archives.

XV. The Party and the Jews

Most of the Bulgarian Jews who chose to stay in Bulgaria rather than leave for Israel hoped that communist internationalism was the solution to the Jewish question in general. In the case of Bulgaria they believed that it could be possible to be loyal to the Bulgarian political state, but also maintain relations with Jews in Israel or any other country where Jews lived, provided that all believed in the world wide class struggle. Many of them also believed that Jewish cultural identity would be possible to maintain within the framework of the Bulgarian communist identity. The pressure to assimilate into Bulgarian national culture was met with certain resistance, as the story of the JRI shows, but it never amounted to organised movement. Certainly some Bulgarian Jews would have preferred to be enabled to build up a hyphenated identity, to be both Jewish and Bulgarian. But this was hard to square with BCP's requirement for cultural homogeneity in Bulgaria. The Jewish performance in the BCP was quite different from other minorities' participation in the communist movement. The ethnic persecution they experienced during the Second World War and their particular involvement in the resistance left a significant mark on the way they perceived Bulgarian communism. As a result Jews were more active in the communist establishment than any other minority. Despite the pressure on them to comply with the Bulgarian policy of ethnic homogenisation, they never saw communism as an alien ideology, in the way most Turkish people did. But Jewish expectations were about being included in the communist structure, rather than simply protected by it.

Yet their influence over the development of communism in Bulgaria was quite limited.⁶⁹ It would be wrong to suggest that the communist party leadership had a consistent policy of discrimination against the Jews. But there was an attitude that they were not to be trusted as they were connected to the outside world, which was feared by the communist leadership. There were Jewish purges all over communist Eastern Europe during the 1950s, which became known particularly with Slansky's trial in Czechoslovakia (1952) and the 'Doctors' Plot' in the Soviet Union (1953).⁷⁰ In Bulgaria things were different. There was no systematic policy to remove Jews from public life in the same manner. However communist Bulgaria was not untouched by anti-Jewish measures. In his memoirs, Iahiel gives an account of the events in the high structures of communist power. He claims that the anti-Jewish campaign in the communist bloc did resonate in the headquarters of the BCP and reservations towards the Jewish membership increased. He also claims that the security services planned investigated the alleged Jewish espionage network.⁷¹ The main source of communist anxiety continued to be Jewish connections

⁶⁹ RFE, SWB EE 5761, 11 Mar 1978. According to the data in this report there were three Jews members of the National Assembly and three Jewish members of the BCP Central Committee. However the actual Jewish membership is hard to estimate because some Jews had Bulgarian names.

⁷⁰ The 'Doctors' Plot' was the fabricated case against nine doctors in the Soviet Union, six of them Jews, who were publicly accused of having poisoned and planned further attempts on their Kremlin patients. They were accused of acting on behalf of the British and American security services and the international Jewish bourgeoisie. Rudolf Slansky was Secretary general of the Czechoslovak Communist Party who was accused of being at the centre of 'Trotskyite-Titoist-Zionist' plot. For more details see Paul Lendvai, Antisemitism in Eastern Europe, (Great Britain: Macdonald & Co., 1971).

⁷¹ See Niko Iahiel, Todor Zhivkov i lichnata vlast: Spomeni, Documenti, Analizi, (Sofia: M-8-M, 1997), p. 45. According to him the security services exerted pressure on the member of the member of the Central Consistory (CC) named Alajem who as a result committed suicide. Iahiel also recollects that in 1950 Mendel Zimmerman was expelled

with Israel or any western country. The only specifically Jewish trial in Bulgaria was in 1961, when Rabbi Dr. Asher Hananel was accused of 'transfer of foreign currency abroad'. The Bulgarian authorities announced that the Sofia city court dealt with his case and sentenced him because of speculation with valuables. In the reasoning it was clarified that while serving as Chief Rabbi, he made use of his contacts with foreigners, deposited money in a Swiss bank and mishandled the synagogue's valuables. It was also announced that Hananel confessed to maintaining contacts with Israelis and others. He was imprisoned and died shortly afterwards.⁷² There were occasional removals of Jews from high positions in the party. During the 1960s, Ruben Levi Avramov, president of the Committee of Science and Culture was criticised and ousted. There is no information suggesting that it was because he was Jewish. But previously Chervenkov, the BCP leader, had intentionally misquoted his name - from Ruben (a typically Jewish name) to Rumen (typically Bulgarian), while delivering a speech. Such open remarks were seen by Jews, as an offence to cultural Jewish identity.⁷³

In general Jews shared an anxiety about being visible, about appearing ethnically different through their names. During the re-naming campaign carried out against the Turks, they were asked to declare that they could choose their names freely and that there were no restrictions on their freedom to practice their religion. The Jewish cultural society had to issue a declaration about this matter, which the authorities used in their defence of the

from the party, Moriz Assa, an instructor at the CC, was purged and one of the secretaries of Todor Zhivkov, Dora Dermendjieva, was also sacked.

⁷² See RFE, December 22/ 3721, 1961. These facts were confirmed by Iohanan Lahav. Personal telephone conversation, 1997.

⁷³ See RFE, December 29, 3758, 1961. This was confirmed by Alfred Krispin in a telephone conversation, Sofia, 1997.

anti-Turkish campaign.⁷⁴ The Jewish community leadership also publicised a statement opposing any interference into Bulgarian sovereignty, in response to Turkey's protests. The official Jewish position was that accusation in forcible Bulgarisation was a 'slander'.⁷⁵ In private, many Jews feared that the regime may initiate a re-naming campaign against them.

⁷⁴ See RFE, SWB EE 8189, 21 February 1986.

⁷⁵ RFE, SWB 8556, 1 May 1987.

XVI. Conclusion

After the Israeli-Arab war in 1967 any Jewish activity was heavily politicised. Jews constantly had to declare that they renounced Israeli policy. Also by the 1970s, when Bulgarian communism was determined to be reaffirmed on the grounds of ethnic nationalism, the pressure on the Jews to identify as ethnic Bulgarians increased and was felt on every level of life.⁷⁶ If Jewish communists were to remain in the movement, they had to accept that the goal of Bulgarian communism was to create a united cultural nation based on common ethnicity. Many Jews were disillusioned with communism, which they expected would treat them as members of the communist political community, rather than ask them to merge into the ethnic Bulgarian nation. This was the main reason for their renewed interest in emigration to Israel. During the 1980s communist Bulgaria became more relaxed about connections with Israel, although there were no diplomatic relations between the two countries. In 1988, the wife of the Israeli prime minister, Yizhak Shamir, visited Bulgaria to attend the celebrations of 45 years since the saving of the Jews. There were speculations about this visit being an attempt on behalf of Israel to establish diplomatic relations, but nothing significant emerged. Also during the same year, Todor Zhivkov received Serge Zweingenbaum, Secretary General of the World Jewish Congress.⁷⁷ At that point, the Jewish disillusionment with communism was very high and the main topic was whether there were any possibilities

⁷⁶ See RFE, SWB, 4302, 23 May 1973. The occasion on which Todor Zhivkov attended the meeting at the Jewish Cultural Centre in Sofia was the 30th anniversary of the communist campaign to save the Jews. At the meeting the head of the Cultural Association of Jews in Bulgaria, Astrukov, asserted the leading and sole role of the communist party in the saving of the Jews, who since have been living as equal socialist citizens of Bulgaria.

⁷⁷ See RFE, 20 December 1988.

for an agreement to renew immigration to Israel. At the same time many Bulgarians saw Jewish support for the Bulgarian communist regime as a betrayal of Bulgarian nationalism. Because of the strong affiliation of the Jewish institutions with communism and the specific way Jewish politics worked, being Jewish in Bulgaria was often taken to mean automatically being a communist. Thus Jews acquired the image of being pro-communist 'by nature' and anti-Bulgarian in the eyes of those nationalist minded Bulgarians who saw communism as a threat to nationalism. This was the main reason why after 1989, Bulgarian dissatisfaction with communism had also an anti-Semitic colouring. Some of the heroes of the nationalist anti-communist opposition were pre-war politicians with anti-Semitic record. Such was the case with Ivan Dochev, the leader of the former pro-fascist organisation of Bulgarian Legionaries, whose visit in Bulgaria after the changes worried the Jewish community in Bulgaria and fascinated some new Bulgarian democrats.

Under communism Bulgarian Jews had the peculiar position of being both patronised by the regime and also very vulnerable. The discrimination some Jews experienced in the BCP was always quite subtle and hard to articulate.⁷⁸ Jews in communist Bulgaria were privileged compared to the Turks because they lived mainly in the big urban centres and unlike many Turks never became an underclass. On the other hand Jewish issues were never considered as significant as Turkish affairs, nor could then rival the importance of the Macedonian question in Bulgaria. Jews were perceived either as hosted by or saved by the Bulgarians. They did not question the legitimacy of the Bulgarian nation and had no claims over Bulgarian lands. What Jews had a claim over was Bulgarian communism itself. Jews who stayed after 1949 in the country saw communist Bulgaria as their rightful homeland, which was to guarantee much better conditions of Jewish life than the pre-war

Bulgarian state. Yet their hope that communism would bring justice for all citizens of Bulgaria and thus solve the problems of Jewish identity remained a fantasy. Bulgarian communism offered them assimilation into the ethnic Bulgarian national state instead. In Bulgaria Jewish linguistic and cultural assimilation was greatly encouraged by the high rate of mixed marriages. Despite this the majority of the Jews felt that they were never fully trusted by their fellow Bulgarians. After the anti-Turkish campaign nobody could say where were the limits of assimilation be according to the Bulgarian communist leadership towards ethnic minorities.

⁷⁸ See Iahiel, Todor Zhivkov i lichnata vlast, 1997.

Chapter 7: Post-communism –

The Legacy of Communism and the Politics of Ethnicity (1989-96)

I. Introduction

On 9 November 1989 the news broke that Todor Zhivkov, the leader of the BCP and the long-standing head of the Bulgarian state has been ousted from power. Political change was sweeping across Eastern Europe and that change had come to Bulgaria. Communism, which ruled the country for 45 years, had lost its legitimacy. The big question: after the end of communism what was to follow? This chapter examines two major questions of the country's post-communist development: How was communism in Bulgaria brought down? And what was the legacy of communism in Bulgarian politics in relation to ethnic issues and nationalism? It argues that much of the transformation of Bulgaria, begun in 1989, was determined by the politicisation of ethnic issues under communism. The analysis is based on the premise that the legacy of communist policies on the national questions was to define the country in ethnic terms and set the basis of the inter-ethnic dynamics after 1989. The formation of new political parties representing ethnic minorities (Movement for Rights and Freedoms, MRF, and United Macedonian Organisations-Ilinden, UMO-Ilinden), or parties concerned directly with national questions, such as the renewed Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Union of Macedonian Societies (IMRO-UMS or VMRO-SMD¹), appeared on the political stage and introduced the most important development in Bulgarian nationalism after the fall of communism. The politics of ethnic nationalism in post-communism Bulgaria were

heavily burdened by the communist past. And although communism was officially declared dead, its legacy dominated Bulgarian political life for many more years.

The BCP entered a period of long and cumbersome transformation and its position in relation to the national questions continued to be a major factor during the period of post-communism in Bulgaria. The communist policy on issues of nationalism was blamed for all the misfortunes of Bulgarian national development. In contrast to the communist period, when the BCP was the only legitimate political party, after 1989 it had to compete with other political parties. This was a major change for the party, which had no tradition in democratic competition and was not used to being held accountable for anything to its electorate. During the previous 45 years of its rule the BCP had to balance as much as possible three main factors in relation to nationalism: the Marxist-Leninist approach to nationalism and internationalism, the Soviet line and Bulgarian national sensitivities. After the changes of 1989, the communists had to accept that other theories of society may have a say in the world of politics. Bulgarian society was reawakening to the new life of political pluralism and democratic choice. As a result of all these changes, the BCP was compelled to reorganise itself in some manner in order to be able to meet the new demands. The party declared itself to be the defender of Bulgarian national interests and called for 'national reconciliation' (*natsionalno pomirenje*). The supremacy of the Soviets was no longer in demand and Bulgarian communists chose to reinvent themselves openly as Bulgarians first.

This chapter is concerned with the period between the years of 1989-96. It has been known mainly as the period of 'transition' or 'post-communism' in Bulgarian politics.

¹ VMRO-SMD is the acronym in Bulgarian language (Vutreshna Makedonska Revolutsiona Organizatsia-Suyuz na Makedonskite Druzhestva).

These terms were applied to all former communist countries in Eastern Europe. In this research both terms are used interchangeably, though Bulgarian development is most accurately described as 'post-communist'. Bulgarian communism was particularly unprepared for change. In fact it was pushed to change by the transformation of the USSR, which developed rapidly and unexpectedly towards the full collapse of the socialist bloc. Bulgaria had hardly any tradition of reform under communism and the changes both surprised and frightened the country. Shortly after the initial excitement of the fall of the communist regime it was felt that the transition to something new may be long, and ineffective and the future uncertain. During this period the BCP maintained its strong position. It is this continued strength which makes 'post-communism' an accurate description for the Bulgarian transition. In this analysis, the legacy of communism determined the political and social life in the country until 1997. Until then reactions against the BCP mingled with nostalgia towards communism and with a search for a new formula of the Bulgarian nation-state. The long years of isolation and the lack of experience in political pluralism, as well as the unfavourable position of the country during the Balkan crisis surrounding the collapse of Yugoslavia made Bulgaria very vulnerable and susceptible to the rhetoric of nationalism. Nationalism seemed to be the most likely political, cultural and moral category which could provide order to the fragmented and strained life of post-communist Bulgaria.

During post-communism, Bulgaria continued to perceive Macedonia as a national loss. The communist policy was declared wrong and the pre-war nationalist position deemed inadequate. Emotionally post-communist Bulgaria could not accept the existence of the Macedonian nation, but practically it made a break-through in Bulgarian-Macedonian relations being the first country to recognise the independent Macedonian state, in 1991. The internal aspect of the Macedonian question was reactivated by the resurrection of

Bulgarian Macedonian organisations, which gradually became accepted as part of the main stream politics of the country. The most painful issue continued to be the claim that there may be a separate Macedonian identity within Bulgaria itself. As a result Pirin Macedonia was subjected to particularly intense political propaganda from all sides in the continuing debate over the Macedonian question in Bulgaria.

The question of the communist legacy became particularly painful in the context of interethnic relations between Bulgarians and Turks during post-communism. The consequences of the re-naming campaign of 1984-85, and the consequent forcible resettlement of the Bulgarian Turks in 1989, raised issues which the BCP had to respond to, and Bulgarians by and large would have preferred to be forgotten. The communist attempt to erase Turkish ethnic identity failed. The claim that all Turkish people in the country were of Slav-Bulgarian origin who converted to Islam under the pressure of the Ottoman colonisers was rejected as false by most of the BCP members themselves. On the other hand the vast wound opened by the anti-Turkish campaign was not yet been healed. The emigration to Turkey continued - although in smaller numbers than during the major exodus, many families after 1989 had to endure the experience of division. But the former communists continued to use the Turkish issue to boost the Bulgarian national confidence and stabilise its position. After communism, being Turkish retained the meaning of being part of the oppressive past, backward, reactionary and incompatible with the strivings of Bulgarian nationhood. In short, during post-communism being Turkish continued to signify disloyalty to everything Bulgarian. However there was a big change in the Bulgarian-Turkish interaction during post-communism. This was represented by a political party for the Bulgarian Turks, the Movement for Rights and Freedom (MRF) in 1990. The MRF became a major player in post-communist Bulgarian politics. The new political position of the Bulgarian Turks

moved the community quite far from its marginal position before and during communism. The Turkish voice became a very active political factor in post-communist Bulgaria. Substantial changes were also made in the interpretation of Bulgaria's Ottoman past. There were new and old opinions, which started competing with each other in a much more constructive manner. The serious debate was launched over both negative and positive aspects of how 'bad' or how 'good' was Ottoman rule. This was a breakthrough not only in the scholarly world but also in the popular mind.

As far as the Jewish presence in Bulgaria is concerned, after 1989 Jewish life also changed noticeably. Some of the old Jewish institutions were restored, new ones were founded and others waited to be re-established. Jewish life was revived in Bulgaria and became much more visible. International Jewish organisations opened offices in Sofia and some of the other big cities in the country. Bulgaria re-established diplomatic relations with Israel and the Bulgarian Jews were re-connected with Israel. This development had another important result. Since 1989 Jews have been leaving the country in small but steady numbers. Consequently Bulgarian Jewish culture has been becoming increasingly a social memory rather than living reality. The major question 'who saved the Bulgarian Jews' was opened to debate and the truthfulness of the communist claim, that they were rescued by the communist movement has been seriously questioned. Bulgarian Israelis could speak from their personal memories and many of them praised the diplomacy of the Bulgarian king Boris III during the Second World War for his role in saving the Jews.

Finally the debate on minorities' rights opened in the context of human rights movement and international institutions. Post-communist Bulgaria's attitude towards its minorities was quite complex. On one hand, there was the history and the memory of the unfavourable Ottoman times in Bulgaria when Bulgarians were a discriminated minority.

On the other hand Bulgarians were coming to terms with the new international understanding of minorities rights, forcefully introduced by the burning issues of the Yugoslav crisis. In contrast to communist times when most basic information about human rights' international aspects was lacking, after 1989 the topic was constantly debated. Post-communist Bulgaria aspired to European values, but this also meant that it had to review its own identity accordingly. This was a hard thing to do in the general atmosphere of insecurity surrounding the Balkans in the 1990s. The highly politicised history of Bulgaria studied under communism, as well as the very weak tradition of civil society, deepened the anxiety of the Bulgarian people. The feeling of national uniqueness mingled with the notion of being victimised by history itself, divided by the Great powers' geopolitical interests, forgotten by Europe.

The change of government in January 1997 marked the beginning of a new era in Bulgarian politics. The government of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP, formerly BCP) was forced to resign under the pressure of mass demonstrations in the capital, demanding new elections. The new government of the United Democratic Forces (a block of the main opposition parties) could no longer legitimise itself as a transitional political power only. It had to develop a new language of political, social and economic advancement, rather than being a corrector of the communist past. Most importantly, the understanding of the future of the Bulgarian nation-state was decisively directed towards West European standards of citizenship above ethnicity. The communist period was over and Bulgaria had taken a decisive step beyond the politics of ethnicity.

II. The Fall of the Bulgarian Communist Regime

By 1989 the majority of the citizens of communist Eastern Europe believed that they lived in a seriously dysfunctional political system. Yet at the same time the overwhelming feeling was that the communist elites were far too strong to be removed from power. The central position of the Soviets was still in place and although Poland and Hungary were already on the road to serious political changes, the socialist bloc was still holding together. Schöpflin argues that six main factors which determined the fall of communism in Eastern Europe: 1) economic decay, 2) the loss of support of the intellectuals, which went hand in hand with the change of the language of public political discourse, 3) the popular awareness that the system was vulnerable in 1989, (particularly in Romania and Bulgaria, 4) the growing division in the communist leadership, 5) the role of the crowd in the events of 1989 and 6) the international dimension, including the importance of the lack of Soviet support for the old regimes.² The degree of the importance of these factors differed in each of the communist countries in Eastern Europe.

In Bulgaria the changes were brought about by combination of four of the main factors listed above. First and most important, Bulgaria lost the active support of the Soviets. The political balance was seriously disturbed by this factor, which had played such an important role in the politics of communist Bulgaria. The main question was, Could Bulgaria continue to be a communist country without the support of the Soviet Union? Bulgaria was totally unprepared for the major shift in Soviet politics, introduced by Gorbachev in the 1980s. The stability of the Soviet Union itself was accepted as the most powerful protection for Bulgarian communism. It was perceived both as granted by history and earned by long years of loyalty to Soviet communism. The changes in the

² See Schöpflin, Politics in Eastern Europe, pp. 226, 233.

Soviet system were felt strongly in a country used to following the Soviet line with no reservations. But this time the changes required a much more complicated policy than obedience to the Soviet power. Communist Bulgaria, as a most loyal satellite, thought that control from Moscow provided the Soviets with dominance in the region, but also guaranteed that Bulgarian communism would remain in power. This attitude supported by the Bulgarian lack of experience in reforms, created a situation of no options. Until 1989, no stratum of Bulgarian society had a clear vision of an alternative to communism.

Second, during the 1980s the vision of the future of Bulgarian communism was lost. The increasing information about the cultural and economical successes of the democracies in western Europe and the United States of America (USA) made it very difficult to believe that communism was winning the cold war. The decline of the Bulgarian economy sharpened the social divisions and by the 1980s the class divisions within communist society were very visible. The party establishment formed its own class, enjoying material benefits which were inaccessible to the rest of the population. This was the time of the special shops called 'Korecom', selling goods in western currency. The sons and the daughters of high party members started driving western cars in central Sofia. There was little doubt that the 'new class' was aspiring to western standards of life, which seemed at best a very remote opportunity to the ordinary people.

Third, the Bulgarian intellectuals slowly and hesitantly began to reject communist dogma and question the legitimacy of the regime. There were various informal circles of young scholars, mostly at the University of Sofia, who were trying to promote new ideas in the fields of philosophy, history or literature. They focussed on some kind of a local post-Marxism inspired by the works of the Frankfurt School and Wittgenstein. Although the

activities of these circles did not amount to anything more than talking at coffee shops, the feeling was that people were rethinking their roles in the society.³

Last but not the least, on the eve of the changes of 1989, Bulgarian society was shaken by the ethnic conflict inflicted by the communist regime during the anti-Turkish campaign in 1984-85. In the spring of 1989 the Turkish issue became urgent and could no longer be put on hold or silenced. Whereas the intellectual disquiet was centred in the capital, the Turkish problem involved many parts of the countryside where ethnic Turks lived.

The combination of these factors created the strong feeling that the communist system in Bulgaria was very vulnerable. The feeling was that change was needed in the Bulgarian society, though nobody knew exactly what kind of change was to come.

³ See Stephen Ashley, Bulgarian Intellectuals Circulate an Appeal for Democracy, RFE, Report, 9 May 1989.

III. The Formation of Bulgarian Dissent

Gorbachev's reform in the USSR during the second half of 1980s, the so-called '*perestroika i glasnost*', was felt strongly in Bulgaria. By and large the Bulgarian intelligentsia was greatly interested in the new ideas coming from Moscow. All of sudden the Soviet press and the regular Friday television broadcast from Moscow became the most popular media in the cities. People started exchanging Soviet magazines and discussing the latest news from Moscow with a new energy. The upsurge in the interest in Soviet things was noticeable. But for the communist leadership the changes in the Soviet intellectual life were an unexpected challenge. '*Perestroika i glasnost*' seemed to have presented the BCP with a very difficult dilemma. On one hand, following the Soviet line was a must, if Bulgaria was to maintain its position in the communist bloc. But on the other, Gorbachev's reform required real engagement in the process of change and much greater flexibility on the side of the party elite. Although at this point the Soviet idea was still about how reforms would maintain communism, rather than dismantle it, it was strongly felt that the Bulgarian political elite was taken by surprise by the new policy. Not only did the Bulgarian communists fail to develop a reformist tradition on their own. Until this time, the BCP felt quite comfortable and secure in its position as a Soviet satellite. In reality, it was becoming apparent that Bulgaria's loyalty to Moscow eroded its own ability to develop thinking about reform and change. Gorbachev's '*perestroika*' presented the communist regime in Bulgaria with an impossible task - to fit a new Soviet framework of political thinking, with virtually no preparation period. This seemed very risky to the Bulgarian communists. The pace of the Gorbachev reform picked up and unlocked enormous energy in Soviet society, but very soon the Soviet authorities understood that they could not control the limits of the reform, nor define its direction. The Bulgarian comrades did not receive clear instructions about what exactly to do and how to do it.

This created the biggest confusion in the communist elite. The Soviet policy, not the capitalist West, became to symbolise the biggest danger to Bulgarian communism.

Meanwhile Bulgarian dissent started to seek legitimacy in Soviet '*perestroika i glasnost*'. At that time three main groups were formed represented the new times: reform-minded party members, human rights activists and environmental groups. They were complemented by other individuals, scientists, technocrats or writers who shared the rather vague belief that change may be possible to. There was no sharp division between these groups and often they merged into each other. To some extent they supported each other, although more often in a theoretical, rather than practical way. In general, the communist reformers concentrated on the Soviet '*perestroika*', whereas the human rights activists, were concerned with the issue of the violation of the rights of the ethnic Turks in Bulgaria. The biggest group of Bulgarian intellectuals which focused on the Soviet '*perestroika*' created the Independent Club for the Support of Perestroika and Glasnost in 1988. It was also referred to as The Discussion Club and in 1989 changed its name to the Club for Glasnost and Democracy. It consisted of more than 100 intellectuals, including the prominent writer Blaga Dimitrova and the philosopher Zhelu Zhelev, who was known at the time mainly as the author of the book *Fascism*, which was banned by the authorities. This group stated clearly that Bulgaria needed Soviet-style '*perestroika*'. These intellectual instinct brought together communist ideologists aspiring to reform of the party and writers and artists demanding space for change. This was the first stage of the formation of the Bulgarian dissent.

In general terms the new thinking sought a revision of the Marxist-Leninist theoretical framework as the basis of the communist regime. It aimed to uncover the true socialism, buried in the ill practices of communism. The underlying idea was to re-read Marxism

and to find the human touch in its theory. Yet this idea remained vague and was used in support of the argument that one should not give up the communist ideals because of the wrongs of the BCP. No serious attempt was made to work out a new communist theory and it was too late to do so. The events of change in communist Eastern Europe developed faster than the thinking behind them. To a great extent the Bulgarian dissent restricted itself to issues of freedom of speech, religious and artistic expressions.

The second stage in the development of the Bulgarian intellectual dissent was the organised dissatisfaction, which was activated by the anti-Turkish campaign in 1984-85. The communist regime inflicted a violent ethnic conflict on Bulgarian society, which in its own turn evoked feelings of general disappointment with the communist state and particularly in relation to the communist policy towards the national minorities. This was the background of the human rights movement in communist Bulgaria. During the early stage of its development human rights activists acted in secret, gathering information for western human rights organisations, most notably Amnesty International. Their main idea was to draw public attention to the injustices in communist Bulgaria. For the first time human rights activists were organised in the Plovdiv-based Independent Association for the Defence of Human Rights in Bulgaria, founded in January 1988. The third stage of the intellectual dissent culminated in open support for the Soviet '*perestroika*' and the sweeping changes elsewhere in Eastern Europe during 1989, which forced the BCP to undertake action.

IV. The Role of Economic Decline in the Changes

The other significant factor in the collapse of communism in Bulgaria was the economic position of the country. The main aspect of the economic life which contributed to the fall of the communist system was the complete failure of the Bulgarian economic reforms in the 1970s and 1980s. Bulgaria lacked both ideas and practice in the economic sphere. The Bulgarian economic reforms, as much as they were implemented, were sporadic and gave the Bulgarian communist regime the reputation of being highly incompetent.

The 1960s saw a series of attempts at economic reform. But by the late 1970s, it was clear that despite some achievements the economy was not working satisfactorily. The reforms in the agricultural sector initiated during this period aimed to integrate the agricultural production with the industrial sector. The political implication of this was to merge completely the peasant labour force with the working class according to the communist program. According to Brown, 1968 was the end of the decentralised economic experiments which were promoted in Bulgaria since December 1965. The Bulgarian party strengthened its ideological control over all policies, including over the agricultural and industrial sectors. The lack of advanced technical intelligentsia and lobby in the government, the establishment of total control over the trade unions and the lack of interest groups in the country left Bulgaria without serious reformist thinking.⁴

In the eve of the changes of 1989, it was clear that loyalty to the party remained the foremost principle of appointment to decision-making posts. This made it impossible to

⁴ See J.F. Brown, 'The Interaction Between Party and society in Hungary and Bulgaria', in Andrew C. Janos (ed.), Authoritarian Politics in Communist Europe : Uniformity and

advance through competition. At the beginning of the 1980s the so-called New Economic Model (*Nov Ikonomicheski Mehanism*) was introduced to help the country update its technologies.⁵ But it was based on the traditional communist idea of central planning and self-sufficient socialist economy and was a cosmetic change rather than real reform.

As a result both the working class and the peasantry in Bulgaria became increasingly sceptical towards any economic reforms. According to their experience, change in the economic sphere brought new hardships and further mismanagement of resources. At the same time the regime's propaganda about the prosperity of the proletariat droned, but it was much harder to maintain this communist myth. Working people became particularly resentful of the negative effects of the changes on their living standards and tended to see everything through the prism of material benefit or lack of there of. In general the Bulgarian working class was very cautious about any changes and regarded them as a game invented at the top of the power structures. And because it was a semi-urban class, it combined the mistrust of the countryside towards the more complex attitudes of the city life with sense of loss of their natural environment. Yet during the late 1980s the working class also engaged in the movement for change in Bulgaria. The main motivation behind the working class independent activities was to become a visible political and social force. The trade unions under communism were under the total control of the communist party and had no independent political role. With the general movement towards reform in the 1980s, the first independent trade union, *Podkrepa*, was founded in Bulgaria. Although undoubtedly the ideas behind its foundation were inspired by Solidarity in Poland, *Podkrepa* never acquired the same degree of political

Diversity in One-Party States, (Berekeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1976), pp. 113-115.

⁵ See Crampton, A Short History of Modern Bulgaria, pp. 192-205.

consciousness. The leader of *Podkrepa* was Konstantin Trenchev, a medical doctor by profession. Although he had no working class background, Trenchev had personal charisma and expressed firm anti-communist views. He was an inspiration for many people to join the independent trade union *Podkrepa* during the last years of communism. Yet the lack of experience in independent trade union life in Bulgaria made the working class a very volatile mass during the collapse of the communist system. *Podkrepa* became a symbol of its leader's power rather than a changing force representing working class demands. Nevertheless its foundation in February 1989 was one of the most important events in Bulgaria towards the end of the communist rule.

Yet at a time when change was the slogan of the communist world, Bulgaria had accumulated no productive reformist experience. The communist leadership has not even tested the limits of any reforms. This put the country in a very difficult and vulnerable position. Bulgaria remained isolated from the rest of the developments in the Soviet bloc, though it was no longer possible to ignore them. The movement for Soviet-type reforms combined with the ethnic unrest in the country, pushed by the fall of the communist regimes elsewhere, marked the formal end of communism in Bulgaria, before the society had the time even to think about it. The fall of the old regime was formalised in Bulgaria by the change of the political elite in 1989. But the thinking lagged quite behind. Bulgaria's changes were carried out within the communist framework with the hope that things would remain calm. The communist regime, which was a symbol of radical and revolutionary change, demanded gradual and non-revolutionary reform. The question was how to reform communism when it no longer existed? How to legitimise essentially reformist communist thinking when it was declared dead? Under these circumstances the call for Bulgarian national unity was seen as the only way to maintain a structured society.

V. The Ethnic Factor

While the changes in the Soviet politics prepared the broad background for the fall of communism in Bulgaria, the ethnic conflict inside the country was the most important factor for the actual changes in 1989. The ethnic unrest in the country during that year, which was in response to the anti-Turkish campaign of 1984-85, undermined the regime to such an extent that it finally collapsed. The two main reasons for this development were that the ethnic unrest focused the human rights movement and at the same time internationalised the crisis of Bulgarian communism by making it known abroad. The communist policy towards the Turkish minority, the biggest national minority in the country, speeded up the fall of one of the most stable communist countries in Eastern Europe. Practically, the Turkish issue created a public space for debate about the legitimacy of the communist state. Thus the very right of the ruling communist elite to remain in power came under question. Finally the Turkish problem urged the dissident movement to take a position on questions about ethnic diversity in Bulgaria. By doing this the emerging Bulgarian opposition had to articulate its own aims and objectives in relation to the nation.

The other outcome of the Turkish crisis was that the BCP was forced to revise its policy on national minorities in Bulgaria and to state its position publicly: What was at the core of the of the Bulgarian state according to the BCP : ethnicity or citizenship? There had never been a more difficult and more complicated context for any possible answer to this question in the 45 years of Bulgarian communism in power. The entire political context suggested that the old rhetoric would not be able to satisfy the public any longer without potentially dangerous consequences. The questions of ethnicity and citizenship were firmly ingrained in the very core of the Bulgarian changes. Most of the intellectuals who

were involved in opposition activities associated themselves with the defence of the rights of the ethnic Turks. Yet this proved to be a rather circumstantial commitment on the side of many Bulgarians who declared themselves supporters of minorities' rights. Essentially minority rights related issues served as a channel for putting pressure on the regime. On the surface human rights appeared a priority for the entire Bulgarian society because at the time the biggest concern was the position of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. But in reality leading Bulgarian intellectuals used the Turkish issue to push the changes forward without predicting how much more complicated the future development of the politics of ethnicity might be.

VI. The Role of Bulgarian Intellectuals

The loss of support of a substantial part of the pro-regime intellectuals was a very significant factor in the collapse of the communist regime in Bulgaria in 1989. As pointed out earlier in this work, Bulgarian intellectual life lacked any serious notion of dissent until the 1980s. This is not to say that no Bulgarian intellectual ever thought critically of the regime, but rather that such criticism did not find an appropriate expression. In fact the BCP considered its control over the intelligentsia a significant success. Todor Zhivkov himself seemed very proud of the fact that he personally never trusted them but managed to retain their subservience during his rule.⁶ Indeed most of the Bulgarian intellectuals enjoyed safety and security in their positions near to the political power structures. Schöpflin describes this condition of intellectual life under communism as 'para-opposition'. This concept was developed in the context of the Hungarian intellectuals under communism, but it seems to describe the Bulgarian intellectuals in the 1980s quite precisely.⁷ Although Bulgarian intellectuals had official contacts with their colleagues in the other countries of the Soviet bloc, they had minimal interaction with the dissident movements there. This is clearly illustrated by comparing the state of mind of Bulgarian intellectual dissent with the notions of dissent which developed in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary or Yugoslavia. There was no 'Budapest school' or 'Praxis' in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian variation which seems closest to these formations before the time of '*perestroika*' were the works of the Bulgarian philosopher Zhelu Zhelev, himself a former party member until his expulsion, who had supporters among the similarly thinking intellectuals.

⁶ See Georgi Markov, Zadochni reportazhi za Bulgaria, (Sofia: Profizdat, 1990).

At the same time by the 1980s Bulgarian intellectuals were disappointed with the regime. The vision of its future was lost. Significant divisions within the country's intellectual elite also appeared. The groupings included the communist hard-liners, the traditionalists and the modernisers. The hard-liners were almost strictly party-members and employed by the communist party directly. Typically, they would claim an anti-fascist past and insist that communism was the only available reality, which was not to be debated. They were also pro-Soviet in general and anti-Western. A typical representative of this group was Petur Mladenov, the Moscow educated foreign minister of Bulgaria since 1971. The traditionalists' group consisted of party and non-party members which believed that even if the present communist system was far from perfect, any reforms should be about readjusting it rather than changing the regime. The transformation they imagined was to be carried out within the limits of communist ideology. They were mostly occupied in the humanitarian and technical sector. The regime relied heavily on their support and in fact did not lose it until almost the end. In contrast, most of the modernisers shared the view that changes were imminent. They were a smaller group, in general terms open-minded towards the Western democracies and with strong national feelings. Modernisers were both party and non-party members. The hard-liners and the traditionalists both viewed that the Soviets should be always seen as a guarantee for stability in Bulgaria. In contrast modernisers understood that the Soviet Union itself was undergoing change which might reflect in a more complicated manner on Bulgarian politics. A typical representative of modernisers among the party members was Alexnader Lilov who

⁷ See George Schöpflin, 'Hungary: An Uneasy Strategy' in Archie Brown and Jack Gray, Political Culture and Political Change in Communist States, (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979), pp. 148-149.

emerged in the 1980s as the most prominent ideologue and moderniser of the BCP.⁸

⁸ Alexander Lilov was Moscow educated top rank member of BCP. However he was not re-elected as member of Politburo after 1983 and became director of Institute for Contemporary Social Theories in 1985.

VII. Ethnic Politics During Post-Communism and the MRF

The most radical change in Bulgaria's ethnic politics was the founding of the main political organisation of the Bulgarian Turks, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), which was formally registered at the beginning of 1990.⁹ About a month earlier the Bulgarian communist leader, Todor Zhivkov, had been toppled, and the Union of the Democratic Forces (UDF), the main Bulgarian opposition party was formed. The MRF acquired a huge membership of 100,000 immediately after it was created. It used the previously existing structures of the Turkish organisations as a foundation. Since then the MRF had been a major political factor in post-communist Bulgaria. For the first time in the Bulgarian history, there was a mainstream political force which sprung directly from ethnic oppression exercised by the government. As the law stated clearly that political parties cannot be founded on ethnic lines, MRF carefully avoided defining itself as a political party. Officially it declared that it was not based on Turkish ethnicity and had 4-5 % ethnic Bulgarian membership. But behind the fulfilment of the formalities, MRF clearly represented the voice of the Bulgarian Turks. The MRF platform openly concentrated on the protection and further development of the Turkish minority rights understood mainly as collective rights. Immediate demands were made about the means to restore the cultural and religious rights of the Turkish people. The emphasis was on the establishment of educational rights, including a revision of the school textbooks in order to change the image of the Turks as enemies of the Bulgarian people. In February 1990 a new newspaper 'Rights and Freedom' started to be published in Bulgarian and Turkish languages. Later, the movement insisted that the perpetrators of the crimes committed in relation to the assimilation campaign had to be brought to trial.

⁹ See RFE SWB EE/0671 B/3, 25 January 1990.

Bulgarians warned that the movement was a stepping stone towards territorial division and eventual union with Turkey. Due to such accusations the MRF explicitly excluded from its platform all forms of nationalism, terrorism, chauvinism, revanshism, Islamic fundamentalism, and claims for autonomy.¹⁰ Initially the MRF was close both to the opposition coalition, UDF, and the Independent Association for Democratic Human Rights led by the old guard dissidents Ilia Minev and Eduard Genov. But soon disagreements with the UDF developed. These were mainly about whether the Turkish issue should be taken further or dropped from the immediate political agenda of the new Bulgarian democrats. As a result of the endless squabbling between the UDF and the MRF, many supporters of the Bulgarian opposition began to see the MRF as a divisive force within the Bulgarian opposition. Initially the MRF voted for the opposition. But after registering for elections separately in June 1990 it won 23 seats in the parliament and became the third major political force in the country, alongside the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP, former communists) and the UDF. The MRF found itself in the position of holding the parliamentary balance, which many Bulgarians viewed as highly undesirable. Later, the MRF was accused of causing the fall of the first opposition government led by Filip Dimitrov in a vote of confidence in 1992. This confirmed the Bulgarian opinion that the Turkish question fractured the opposition and played into the hands of the former communists. Consequently it lost some of the support it had enjoyed by the new Bulgarian democrats.

However it would be wrong to suggest that Bulgarian support for Turkish participation in politics was based entirely on the grounds of political manoeuvres. Intellectuals like Blaga Dimirtrova, Elka Konstantinova, Rumen Vodenicharov and other former members of the Club in Support of Perestroika and Glasnost dropped out of Turkish

¹⁰ See Kjell Engelbrekt, The Movement for Rights and Freedoms, RFE, May 31, 1991.

politics not because they no longer supported Turkish rights but because they could no longer see what role could they have in the movement and its issues under the new circumstances. This opinion was partly justified, because after the consolidation of Turkish political elite, the MRF started to promote its own players in the field. But at the same time there was something revealing about the fact that Bulgarian democrats were engaged in Turkish issues when they were high on the agenda of the big political changes. But once the major shift of the political power was realised, Turkish problems did not resonate very strongly with the members of the new Bulgarian democratic elite. In fact the Bulgarian transition echoed anti-Turkish feelings and soon after the changes of 1989 Bulgarian-Turkish interethnic relations were strained once again.

VIII. The Bulgarian Nationalist Backlash

In December 1989 the Bulgarian government announced that Turkish names could be taken back. Accordingly a new law governing names of Bulgarian citizens passed in parliament on 5 March 1990. The MRF opposed the law because it postulated that there should be a bureaucratic court procedure for changing back the Turkish names. It also opposed the law because officially the government did not recognise that the Turkish minority was a national minority in Bulgaria. The Turkish question became again a big political question in the country. Sixty Bulgarian historians of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia University, and the National Library publicly expressed their support for the MRF's demands and stated that the BCP forced them to back the anti-Turkish campaign. But not all sections of the population welcomed the decision to allow Bulgarian Turks to get their names back. On the local level many Bulgarian officials and ordinary people who were strongly against it. Tension rose high in some of the Turkish regions. The immediate reasons were that the local nomenclature bought or sold cheaply the houses of those who left, and they feared accountability. In the region of Kurdjali in the south-east, where the agitation was the strongest, most of the Bulgarians are descendants of refugees from Turkey or Greek Thrace from the time of the Balkan wars and tend to be quite sensitive on national questions. Also the new Bulgarian nationalists, who emerged after 1989, claimed that the mass exodus in the summer of 1989 was an expression of the Turkish people's lack of patriotism. Members of the communist party also felt uneasy about the reversal of the anti-Turkish policy.

In January 1990, Bulgarians demonstrated in front of the parliament against the restoration of Turkish names. They were followed by a Turkish counter-demonstration

in Kurdjali. Afterwards unrest spread to other towns, including Plovdiv and Shumen.¹¹ There were speculations that the local authorities supported the Bulgarian nationalists and helped them with transport to the capital and supplies of food. The suspicion was that the anti-Turkish demonstrations were again organised by the Bulgarian communists. During the Sofia demonstrations the UDF felt that it would be better to distance itself from the Turkish issue. Talks were held and a special forum at the parliament was established, The Public Council on the Various Aspects of the Ethnic Issue, to discuss the matter. Eventually compromise was found. To appease the nationalists the Council issued recommendations for a ban on separatist and autonomist organisations, as well as displaying the Turkish flag. The Council also recommended confirmation that Bulgaria had only one official language, the Bulgarian language, and an amnesty for those imprisoned in connection with the name-changing campaign.

During this period the new Bulgarian nationalists were getting organised and registering officially. The most influential Bulgarian nationalist organisations, which had strong opinions on the Turkish question, were the Committee for the Defence of National Interests (OKZNI) and the Fatherland's Party of Labour (OPT).¹² Their main target was the MRF itself. Their slogans called for the 'territorial integrity' of Bulgaria and 'ethnic space' for Bulgarians. They saw themselves as new democrats and anti-communists and looked for support to legitimise their claims in the interwar history of Bulgaria. Mincho Minchev, a parliamentary deputy and a leading figure in the OKZNI, stated that 'the question of the Turkish names of places has been decided as early as 1934' referring to the national reforms of the Damian Velchev/Kimon Georgiev government which were

¹¹ See Stephen Ashley, Ethnic Unrest During January, RFE, 9 February, 1990.

about homogenising Bulgarian society.¹³ The nationalists argued that the government had acted in a totalitarian manner because it took the decision to restore the Turkish names without consulting the Bulgarian people themselves. They claimed that once manipulated by the previous regime they did not want to be manipulated again. But the reality was that those who actively supported or observed in silence the anti-Turkish campaign feared revenge. Three months after Zhivkov was overthrown, he was arrested. One of the charges brought against him related to his personal participation in the anti-Turkish campaign. Milko Balev, former Politburo member was also charged with him. The indictment stated that before 1984-85 the Politburo approved a report suggesting a peaceful assimilation and excluding the forced assimilation or deportation to Turkey. The prosecution stated that Zhivkov himself gave orders for the renaming campaign. Balev responded with evidence that other senior party members such as Georgi Atanasov, Dimitar Stoianov, Pencho Cubadinski, Petar Mladenov, Stoian Mihailov, Chudomir Alexandrov and Iordan Iotov also participated in the campaign and that secret decisions were taken by the Politburo.¹⁴ Zhivkov himself denied sole responsibility but said that he felt no guilt for the campaign because Bulgaria had been threatened by Turkish terrorist groups and demands for autonomy. He said that he had been preventing a possible Cyprus scenario in his homeland. The trial was adjourned, delayed, and since the BSP (the former BCP) resumed power in 1992, the legal process was discouraged on different

¹² See Janusz Bugajski, Ethnic Politics in Eastern Europe: A Guide to Nationality Policies, Organizations, and Parties, (Armonk, New York, London: M.E. Sharp, 1995), pp. 244-248.

¹³ Mincho Minchev. Interview for the BBC World Service, Bulgarian Section, 29 January 1990.

¹⁴ See Hugh Poulton, The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict, (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1993), pp. 119-121.

grounds such as Zhivkov's deteriorating health. Ultimately the case against the former leader was dropped.

There was little doubt that many former communist activists were involved in the anti-Turkish campaign and had no interest in further investigation. Moreover it was repeatedly suggested that the Turkish leaders were not exerting enough pressure on the issue because some of them were also former communists and supporters of the campaign. Still, for the first time, ethnic violence was discussed publicly within the country as the policy of the communist party. Attempts were made to analyse the link between nationalism and communism in the framework of violence as a basic ingredient of the communist power and a natural extension of exclusive nationalistic claims. The most obvious questions were whether the BSP/BCP could continue to live as an organisation with the guilt and the fear and could it call itself a communist/socialist party while the evidence of the ethnic persecution it carried out was revealed.¹⁵ The question of guilt was a major issue throughout Eastern Europe in the immediate aftermath of the fall of communism. In Bulgaria the opening of the files from the communist period was delayed because it was claimed that lustration may renew the ethnic conflict in the country. As the Bulgarian public gradually accepted that the MRF would remain a major political factor, most people wanted Turkish politics to be accorded to the Turks, and Bulgarian politics to the Bulgarians. The leader of the MRF, Ahmed Dogan, suggested that Bulgaria's road to the West may very well have to be via Turkey and the East. Such arguments were met with extreme hostility. Although mostly based on economic factors, the idea hinted at the age-old undesired association of Bulgaria with the East as opposed to the West, which was now its main destination.

¹⁵ Zlatko Angelov, *Več* 21, 24 October, 1990.

On the other hand the Turkish question was a human rights issue and international organisations firmly demanded an improvement of the Bulgarian record in this area. In this context the westernisation of the country, as seen in the West, depended on the state of interethnic relations. But the Bulgarian nationalists saw this concept as inviting foreign powers to interfere into the internal affairs of the country. After the elections in 1991 Bulgaria had its first opposition government and the MRF became the third political power in the country, with about one-fifth of the parliamentary seats. The UDF preferred to talk about the electoral support they received from the MRF to form a government, but not about an alliance, because they did not want to alienate the nationalist minded people among the Bulgarian public and some of the opposition parties, which also disliked MRF's power. Although officially the MRF was not an ethnic party, there was wide-spread resentment about the fact that the political balance in the new Bulgaria was in Turkish hands. Several UDF leaders raised concern that, even if Bulgarians are not anti-Turkish, they felt that the country's fate should not be decided by a small ethnic minority.

The Turkish issue in Bulgaria after 1989 was related to the mother country of the Bulgarian Turks, Turkey. Immediately after the fall of Bulgarian communism there was a significant effort to improve the relations with Turkey. In the context of the Yugoslav crisis her role as the major NATO power in the region, seemed even more important to Bulgaria. Bulgaria had reasons to pay special attention to Turkey for economic reasons, too. In 1990 the improvement of bilateral military relations was significant with many exchange visits. The Bulgarian General Staff went to Turkey and became the first such senior military visitor since communism came to Bulgaria. In 1991 Turkish officers visited troops and military compounds in Bulgaria (Harmanli) and some agreements were signed in regard to border control. In 1992 the UDF government officially declared that

the two countries are friends.¹⁶ Bulgarian relations with Turkey were further complicated by Greece, the other important regional power bordering Bulgaria. The relations between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey were indirectly complicated by the ethnic issues in each country. Greece was very aware that for Turkey good relations with Bulgaria would be a counterbalance to the Greek threat. Also the new situation in the Balkans, the strength of the pro-Islamic forces in Turkey, the volatility of the Middle East and Central Asia was likely to complicate even further the future of the Bulgarian Turks and the Balkan Muslims in general. Similarly to the Albanian position to the Albanian questions in Macedonia and Kosovo, Turkey showed the Bulgarian Turks that they would be better off if they found their own way of life within Bulgaria.

The first census conducted after the collapse of the communist system in December 1992 caused considerable controversy due to Bulgarian nationalists objections. The Bulgarian Turks demanded that the census include questions on ethnicity, native language and religion. The census's polemics reflected how important this issue was for everyone in Bulgaria. This was also a reaction against the communist years when registering nationality was solely a decision for the BCP. Bulgaria's post-communist debate about a national census should include in its questionnaire showed the fear that registering ethnicity may undermine the Bulgarianness of the country. On the other side the Turks as well as other minorities felt that they must be visible in Bulgarian society through their ethnic identities.

¹⁶ See Andrei Georgiev and Emil Tsenkov, Bulgaria and the Recognition of Macedonia (1991-1992), (Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy (Ethnic Conflicts in Eastern Europe: Security and Human Rights Implications, 1993).

The arrangement of the Turkish presence in post-communist Bulgaria was a record of the minority's effort to achieve political visibility in order to defend its culture and participate in the society. The difficulties of its acceptance by the Bulgarian side reflected mainly the fear that multi-ethnicity may be legitimised in the country and that this in its turn may lead to demands for Turkish cultural autonomy. This would require a major change in the Bulgarian political and cultural frame of mind, which seemed totally unacceptable. In the transitional period after the end of communism the leadership of the Bulgarian Turkish community developed political sophistication and an expertise on the international human rights conventions. Like their Bulgarian fellow-countrymen the Turks realised that the society will be undergoing fundamental changes and they engaged in the political struggle for control of the direction of this fundamental change.¹⁷

¹⁷ See Ibrahim Taturlu, 'Ramkovata Konventsia za Pravata na Maltsinstvata i Bulgarskiyat Model', *Demokraticheski Pregled*, Vol. 1, 1996.

IX. Macedonian Organisations in Post-communist Bulgaria

After the changes in Bulgaria a number of Macedonian organisations were established. In the fall of 1989 the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Union of Macedonian Societies (VMRO-SMD) was registered. It claimed to be reviving the VMRO that was leading the movement for the liberation of Macedonia from Turkish rule and its unification with Bulgaria. VMRO supporters believed that Yugoslav Macedonia was a pure creation of the Comintern supported by the Bulgarian communists and was aimed against the national interests of the Bulgarian people. The organisation published a number of pamphlets denying the legitimacy of the Macedonian nation. Its role in the Bulgarian political life was somewhat underestimated at the beginning. But in December 1994 VMRO-SMD candidates ran for the general elections together with the UDF and won two seats in Parliament. VMRO-SMD by then accepted the new realities of the region: it claimed that Bulgarian foreign policy had no interest in being involved in a Balkan conflict, meaning territorial claims over Macedonia, and must support the sovereignty and the integrity of the new state. On the other hand when in February 1995 in Macedonia there were clashes between the police and the Albanians at the opening of the outlawed Albanian-language University in Tetovo, one of the Bulgarian VMRO-SMD MP's publicly used the term 'reintegration of Macedonia' - meaning with Bulgaria. Such suggestions implied that if Macedonia was destabilised it would have to seek help from Bulgaria which may lead to unification.

VMRO-SMD and all Bulgarian governments after 1989 have been very hostile towards one Macedonian organisation in Bulgaria, the United Macedonian Organisations - Ilinden (UMO-Ilinden). UMO-Ilinden was founded in April 1990. It had been based in Pirin Macedonia and superseded another organisation called Ilinden that had been based

in Sofia. It was refused registration and defined as an unlawful organisation on the basis that it endangered the territorial integrity of Bulgaria. UMO-Ilinden stresses the existence of a distinct Macedonian identity in Bulgaria. They want Macedonians to be recognised as a national group living within the country. On the question of autonomy they are not united. Some say that autonomy is not their immediate goal but others say that it could be a long-term aim. Opinions also differ on the language question. Some say there is not a Macedonian language; others say it has been mixed with Bulgarian and Serbian; and in more secluded areas people say they speak Macedonian. On the question of borders supporters of UMO-Ilinden express some anarchistic ideas. Because many ordinary people from the Pirin region think that the authorities in Skopje and Sofia are equally far away from their problems and are not sincere representatives of their interests, they tend to imagine a united Macedonia but without borders. Despite the lack of clarity of their platform it could be said that during the post-communist period of Bulgarian politics the organisation demanded some kind of unification of all Macedonians living in Bulgaria on these basis of cultural and ethnic differentiation. The Bulgarian authorities clearly saw UMO-Ilinden as a threat to national integrity. Despite the government's declaration of the 29 December 1989 stating that everyone in Bulgaria would be able to choose his/her name, religion and language, there was fear that if such freedoms were practised freely, Macedonian identity in Bulgaria could be revived or created. Thus state policy on UMO-Ilinden and Macedonian question in Bulgaria, supported by strong mass feeling, was hostile. This was an expression of a collective feeling of fear that Bulgarian nationhood was going to be first polluted, then dissolved and finally transformed into something else and less worthy if mixed with non-Bulgarian elements. The repetitive lamentation of the past was projected into the present and the future: we Bulgarians not only were under the Turks for ages and consequently lost territories and people but also were subjected to the

Soviet rule that was aiming to liquidate us a nation. Such arguments could be heard in the Bulgaria of the early 1990s both from the right and the left of the political spectrum.

X. The Bulgarian Recognition of Macedonia (1991)

After the fall of communism in 1989 the main aspect of the Macedonian question in Bulgaria remained unsolved. This was the denial of a separate Macedonian ethnic identity, culture and history. Yet during post-communism the unification of Macedonia and Bulgaria as well as irredentism in Pirin Macedonia were not active factors in Bulgarian politics. Disputes over the origins of the Macedonian language continued. But the development of a standardised Macedonian language became increasingly accepted by the political parties and the Bulgarian public. The fundamental problem remained the general understanding of a possible change of national identities. As Schöpflin explains, the concept of peaceful changes through civil society's structures has been traditionally weaker in Eastern Europe compared to the West.¹⁸ The concept of change in the Balkans has been associated with revolutionary connotations, meaning radical, sudden and violent. It has been deeply ingrained in the mind that people do not change nationality except by force or manipulation. The history of the region has given them more than enough evidence for this belief. From there derived the popular perception that Macedonians have been misled to believe that they have a separate identity: by communist ideology or/and Tito's policy on the national question in Yugoslavia. The anti-Bulgarian aspects of accepting a separate Macedonian nationhood was seen as a denial of historical Bulgarian ethnicity and tradition in Macedonia, undesired strong Serbian influence in Macedonia and denationalisation of this part of the Macedonian population, which identifies as Bulgarian.

The Macedonian question was resurrected. It was reopened for debate but this time within the framework of the new and frail Bulgarian democracy that was eager to

¹⁸ See Schöpflin, Politics in Eastern Europe, p. 13.

distinguish itself from the communist past. Those who thought of themselves as new pluralists quickly revived the idea about Bulgarian Macedonia. They claimed that Macedonia was created by the Soviets as a part of their programme to dominate in the Balkans and therefore could be a legitimate child of the Comintern only. Now, the line continued, the time had come to stand up, free and unburdened in defence of the genuine national cause, which is that 'Macedonia is ours'. The collapse of Tito's Yugoslavia encouraged the Bulgarian nationalists' belief that similarly to the Yugoslav identity, the Macedonian nation may also prove not viable.

But in 1991 an independent Republic of Macedonia was pronounced and Bulgaria was the first country to recognise it. The decision was taken by the government of the Bulgarian opposition, Union of the Democratic Forces (UDF) which won in the general elections for the first time in November 1991. Several factors helped in taking the decision. First, the government's policy was to dissociate itself clearly from whatever was known as the legacy of Tito's regime in Yugoslavia and to encourage Macedonian self-determination. This decision was also in accordance with the pro-European orientation the UDF government was promoting. By that time Macedonia was the third former republic of Yugoslavia to succeed successfully after Croatia and Slovenia in 1991 and the international community was in favour of it, except Greece. Second, and even more significant the UDF's position on the Macedonian question was a result of its own history. The Bulgarian opposition was very much consolidated as such around the protests against the anti-Turkish assimilation campaign and the consequent politicisation of ethnic relations in the 1980s. Therefore the initial UDF programme on the national question was definitely in support of minorities rights and in coalition with the political party representing the demands of the Turkish people, the Movement for Rights and Freedom. The president Zhelu Zhelev was unquestionably for the recognition of

independent Macedonia. So was the Bulgarian foreign minister, Stoian Ganev, who stated after a visit to Skopje: 'The government of the UDF will not be assuming the role of a historiographer or an ethnographer, but will expect everyone to exert their right to self-determination and be free to feel as they choose.'¹⁹

However it was a recognition of the state but not of the nation: a 'yes' and 'no' definition, which supported mainly the independence of Macedonia in its break from Yugoslavia. The Bulgarian post-communist authorities did not see the political unit, the state, and the national unit, the people, as congruent. Theoretically this understanding may be classified correctly as non-nationalist, if we understand nationalism as 'primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent'.²⁰ On the other hand it rejected the legitimacy of the self-definition of the Macedonian state, which saw itself predominantly as a state made up of people of Macedonian nationality (and others). Therefore the Bulgarian post-communist definition of the Macedonian state served traditional Bulgarian national aspirations for Macedonia being independent rather than in one state with Serbia.

On the other side of the political spectrum was the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP, formerly BCP) and since it was busy with reforming itself on all fronts, the ex-communists argued that the policy towards Macedonia had to be revised much more carefully. Essentially the BSP argued that accepting the existence of a separate Macedonian national and political structure was a mistake made by the old Stalinist communist guard in Bulgaria and must not be repeated. The new Bulgarian socialists wanted to distinguish themselves from the BCP tradition associated with Dimitrov's

¹⁹ Georgiev and Tsenkov, Bulgaria and the Recognition of Macedonia, p. 20.

²⁰ Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, p. 1.

position on the Macedonian question in support of independent Macedonia, though in a federation with Bulgaria. To some extent it was also an illustration for their pro-Greek orientation on the Balkan policy because at the time the Greek socialists were the only one who had any international weight since the collapse of the Russian communist party. (The Greeks severely objected to the recognition of Macedonia under this name, arguing that it implied territorial pretensions.)

Thus although the nationalist card fall in the hands of the communists first, the opposition arrived only to a formally different position on the Macedonian question. Moreover even this pragmatic solution started to be revised very soon. As the UDF lost power in 1992, after nine months in government, it gradually started shifting to more explicit nationalistic stand on Macedonia in order to win more support. VMRO-SMD also exerted pressure on the UDF in this direction. And since relations between the UDF and the MRF started deteriorating after 1992, the Bulgarian opposition became very careful not to loose more of its supporters. As far as public opinion was concerned, at the beginning of the post-communist period after 1989, it was not unanimously regarded that the Macedonian question was a priority of the new Bulgarian politics. Those who were interested in the issue were mainly people from Pirin Macedonia and the western parts of Bulgaria, as well as in Varna on the Black Sea coast, where there is a more compact Macedonian community. Nevertheless the Macedonian question remained hotly debated throughout Bulgarian post-communism. It was both about the past and the present. At the same time the collapse of Yugoslavia encouraged all kinds of speculations about the future of Macedonian, which continued to concern Bulgaria.

Until 1996 the Bulgarian definition of who are the Macedonians was based purely on 'blood and soil' and excluded the non-Slavs of Macedonia: Albanians, Turks and others.

This became also a potentially problematic attitude because according to the Bulgarian citizenship law every Slavo-Macedonian could automatically 'restore' Bulgarian citizenship. In effect the Bulgarian law defined who were the Macedonians according to their ethnic identity. This showed clearly the Bulgarian post-communist concept of citizenship was based on ethnicity.

Post-communist understanding of Macedonian-Bulgarian relations deviated between three main variations. Firstly, that Bulgaria should recognise Macedonia fully, which would acknowledge the complete establishment of two states and two nations. Second, drawing the two countries closer to each other as to become one nation in two states. This theory assumed that Macedonians could no longer withstand the pressure of the Yugoslav crisis and not being fully recognised by the European Union as well as bearing the economic consequences and therefore, so went the hypothesis, Macedonians could consider assuming Bulgarian citizenship and even travel on Bulgarian passports. This would have meant that Macedonians were Bulgarian citizens living outside Bulgaria, which would have inflamed the Macedonian question again. There was also a third theory, which argued that because Bulgarians could speak to the Macedonians without a dictionary and there were more similarities than differences in mentality, customs, etc., relations should be left to develop naturally and somehow inevitably the two nations may unite. The implications of such concept would be that Macedonia could be one way or another attracted to Bulgarisation. The reality however was that the professional classes, economic bureaucracy, the workers, and the agrarian population of the Republic of Macedonia were quite disinterested in such prospects as they did not offer particular economic or any other advantages. Also a Bulgarian government would have been much more centralised than the ex-Yugoslav federative rule in Macedonia which would have not appealed to the new Macedonians. Finally there was also the idea of Greater

Bulgaria, which proposed all Bulgarians living in one state and belonging to one nation, meaning effectively an assimilation of the Macedonians into Bulgarian identity. This scenario was widely thought to be against the interests of Bulgaria itself, however, because it would have interlocked with enormous new difficulties: economic, demographic, ethnic, international. It was entertained in the minds of the extreme Bulgarian nationalists only.

XI. Jewish Life: A Fragmented Memory

After 1989 the Bulgarian Jewish community became much more visible in social life. But in difference to both the Turkish and Macedonian questions, the revisions of Jewish identity in post-communist Bulgaria were solely an issue of ethnic culture and memory. Although many Jewish institutions were restored and new organisations founded, Bulgarian Jews expressed no political ambitions as an ethnic minority. Jewish presence in the Bulgarian political debate during post-communism was mostly in relation to the past. The same old question about who saved the Bulgarian Jews during the Second World War became the central theme of discussion. It divided not only Bulgarian public opinion but most importantly the Jewish community itself. The majority of Bulgarian people and politicians saw the whole issue about the Bulgarian Jews surviving the Second World War primarily as a matter of pride for the Bulgarian nation and its international prestige. Those who believed that communists played the major role in the saving of the Bulgarian Jews seemed to undermine, or even ignore, the contribution of the then-Bulgarian government, which acted under the German occupation, as well as the role of the Bulgarian king, Boris III. In general most of the former communists and many of the Jewish members of the former communist party supported this view.

On the contrary, those who believed that the Bulgarian Jews were saved by the skilful personal diplomacy of Boris III, and the support he received from certain circles in the Bulgarian government, denied that communists had any role in the actual events. They were mainly Bulgarian and Jewish supporters of UDF and many of them expressed monarchist sentiments. Accordingly the Jewish organisations were divided along the same political lines. The biggest Jewish organisation in Bulgaria, Shalom, was established in 1990. It took over the activities of the previous Jewish cultural organisations and

established centres in most of the big cities where there were concentrated Jewish populations. It was strongly felt by Jews themselves that Shalom was a continuation of the communist style Jewish organisation promoting communist ideas among the Jewish community. Another alternative to Shalom was Zion, which was founded in 1991 in Sofia. It tried to unite those members of the Jewish community who wanted to distance themselves from the former communists and supported the ideas of Jewish nationalism. Zion did not attract sufficient support to overshadow Shalom and remained on the margins of Jewish life during post-communist in Bulgaria. There was also a third opinion, which tried to bridge the two opposite sides in the politics of the Jewish community in Bulgaria, supported by Jews who tried to present a balanced approach towards the history of the saving of the Bulgarian Jews. They were not organised formally but rather formed a group of independent minded intellectuals. According to them both the Bulgarian government during the Second World war and the Bulgarian king himself as well as the communist resistance have the right to claim contribution to the saving of the Bulgarian Jews.²¹

After 1989 the intelligentsia was eager to re-invent the pre-communist past as a glorious history. They saw the 'good' Bulgarian nation as the main actor of this history. Those who believed in it were declared democrats and those who opposed this view were labelled hard-line communists.²² Bulgaria developed a new relationship with Israel. In May 1990 the Foreign Minister of Israel, Moshe Arens, visited Bulgaria and paid a special tribute to the Sofia synagogue, then under restoration. An agreement re-establishing diplomatic relations with Israel was signed by him and the then-Bulgarian Foreign Minister, Boiko Dimitrov. This was not simply a state protocol but also a symbol

²¹ Emy Barouch. Personal Conversation. Sofia: 10 July 1996.

²² Atanas Todorov, 'In response to Benjamin Hanne', *Demokratsia*, 13 July 1998.

of the future relationship the Bulgarian Jews were to have with the state of Israel. Travel and immigration to Israel became the most significant feature of the post-communist period of the Jewish life in Bulgaria. Bulgarian Jews reconnected with their relatives in Israel as well as with the whole idea of having a second mother-country.

The other main aspect of the Jewish debate during post-communism, which was also a part of the debate about 'who saved the Bulgarian Jews', concerned Bulgarian responsibility for the deportation of 12,000 Jews from the occupied territories. In February 1993 for the first time the Bulgarian National Assembly held a commemorative session in memory of the Jews deported from Macedonia and Thrace, who perished in the concentration camps. The event was politicised by the remark of one BSP member of the Bulgarian parliament, who stated that it was the Bulgarian king Boris III, who signed the deportation order himself. The response came from the UDF member of the parliament, who asserted that although there were controversies around the king's role, nobody should deny that he helped save the Bulgaria Jews.²³ Similar disagreements appeared regularly in the Bulgarian post-communist press. Nobody really accepted the idea that Bulgaria had anything to do with the Jewish deportations from Macedonia and Thrace. During the post-communist years the only criticism of Bulgaria's role in the faith of the Jews from the Bulgarian 'occupied territories' came from the Jewish community in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.²⁴

²³ RFE, EE/1624, quoting BTA, 24 Feb 1993.

²⁴ See Zhamila Kolohomos and Vera Veskobuk-Vangeli, Evreite vo Makedonia vo Vtorata Svetovna Voina (1941-1945): Sbornik na Dokumenti, (Skopje: Fond '11 Mart 1943', 1986). Also see Marin Trenevski, 'Bugari revnosniji od nematza', Holokaust Makedonskih Jevrejah, [Skopje](4) and 'Spaseni' Bugarski Jevreji', Holokaust Makedonskih Jevrejah, [Skopje] (6).

XII. The BSP and the Bulgarian National Questions

In 1989 Bulgarian communism collapsed but the ruling communist party remained the main political force in the country for the next six years. Yet the BCP could no longer legitimate itself as a ruling party inspired by the ideas of communism because communist ideology was discredited everywhere in Eastern Europe. The BCP, which for 45 years found a way to avoid reform, had to change. First of all, the BCP decided to change itself by replacing its long standing leader, Todor Zhivkov. It seemed a dramatic change, given that he had stayed in power for 35 years. The aim of his replacement was to mark the end of the old-style communist regime in Bulgaria and to save the ruling position of the party. There were two immediate problems with this move. The fall of Zhivkov seemed the wish of the majority of people in the country. But at the same time, the lack of suitable leader to replace him led to the widespread feeling that he was a victim of the party, not the other way around. Petur Mladenov, the former Bulgarian foreign minister, took over the leadership after Zhivkov was removed on 10 November 1989. But he was an old style party *aparatchik* and a well-known hard-liner. He could neither give new image to the communist party in Bulgaria, nor lead dialogue with the new opposition. But in those chaotic days, the replacement won time for the BCP to decide what to do next.

The most important organisational change in the party came in April 1990 with the change of its name: the BCP became the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). This was the most important transformation, which signified that the party was determined to stay in power and therefore prepared to change.²⁵ Above all the change of the name of the party

²⁵ See Wolfgang Hopken (ed.), Revolution auf Raten: Bulgariens Weg zur Demokratie, (Munchen: Oldenbourg, 1996), p. 93.

became a symbol of the communist transformation, which denied communist ideology and claimed association with socialism understood in its broad sense and as a part of the social democratic traditions of Europe rather than the Soviet Union alone. The 14th (extraordinary) congress of the BCP, which was held in 1990, ended with the endorsement of a reformist manifesto. The new creed of the party affirmed that although the BCP would remain essentially a Marxist party, as opposed to Marxist-Leninist. Thus the BCP decided not to follow the social democratic path other former ruling East European communist parties chose, while preparing for free elections. The newly restructured leadership of the BCP elected Alexander Lilov as its leader. Lilov was once the right hand of Zhivkov's daughter, but since her death, he had been out of favour with Zhivkov. Now, after the changes in 1989, he was rehabilitated to the top ranks of the party. He was the brain of the new ideology of the Bulgarian communists, who rejected Zhivkov's policies as 'neo-Stalinist' and declared that the BSP was going to be a 'new type of modern left party'.²⁶ Lilov's view was that despite of the revision of the past the party should remain united. However it was not clear what exactly the ideology of its new unity was going to be apart from rejecting Stalinism and Zhivkovism. It also remained quite unclear what was going to be the BSP's understanding of Marxism after the 'de-Leninisation' or the 'de-Communisation' of Bulgarian communism. No serious discussion on the theory of communism followed the collapse of the communist system in 1989. Most scholars of the younger generation of Marxist philosophers reoriented themselves towards studies of political pluralism and classical liberalism. The ideological revision of the communist party in terms of rejecting the dogmatic past and asserting socialist principles allowed it to claim that it was the protector of socialism in general and of all social policy issues in terms of policy making. This was an important tactical

²⁶ See Veselin Tsachevski, Bulgarskyat Comunizum, (Sofia: IKK 'Slavika', 1993), pp. 442-450.

claim because concern about economic difficulties, law and safety were increasing rapidly after 1989. However there was no clarity about which way should the Bulgarian economy go during the transition. The state economy was pronounced dead both by the BSP and the opposition. The Prime Minister Andrei Lukanov, a prominent reformer in the BSP, stated in his Cabinet declaration of September 1990 that state economy was 'economy of the absurd' and that the new market economy would be dictated by 'every man for himself'.²⁷ This position was opposed by hard-liners within the BSP who insisted that material wealth should be distributed by the state. In order to preserve its own unity as well as to respond to the popular demand for security and safety the BSP worked out a platform which aimed to underline the importance of the state during post-communism: 'We stand for a mixed economy based on state, private and cooperative property'. The BSP declared that the privatisation it stands for was 'social privatisation'.²⁸ With this essentially populist platform combining demands for the rejection of planned state economy with privatisation, but under the umbrella of social security, the BSP won the absolute majority in the elections of 1994.

In relation to issues of nationalism the BSP was reforming under slogans of rights and freedoms of all individuals and ethnic groups as declared in the Agreement between all political forces signed in December 1990. But in terms of policy the BSP retreated from civic definitions of nationhood and promoted Bulgarian ethno-centred education .

Ethnic minorities' non-profit organisations were attacked as being agents of foreign powers aiming to undermine the Bulgarian state and by 1995 most governmental bodies withdrew from joint projects with non-governmental organisations. Also a substantial grant of the World Bank for education reforms was rejected on the grounds that such

²⁷ See *The Insider*, Pilot issue, Summer 1990, p. 22.

²⁸ *The Insider*, 12/94, B&CA Supplement, p.8.

reforms would stimulate multiculturalism at the expense of Bulgarian national awareness.²⁹

Another equally significant change which the BSP had to undergo was to learn to use new political language in public debate. The very idea that political power was to be contested reflected first of all on the way the party was to express its views. Before, the communist party could speak only the political language which confirmed the party line and avoided controversies. Now party statements were scrutinised by the public, the new political opponents, the local and the foreign media. Everything stated by the party in words or gestures was interpreted and discussed in political life. This was a totally new phenomenon, which pushed the BSP to clarify its platform. The new socialists, who were discredited as former communists, could offer very little beside the call for Bulgarian national unity. Political pluralism, represented by the emergence of the opposition political parties, was declared as the road to divide the Bulgarian nation. At the same time the Bulgarian socialists had to deal with their past, which was also provoking a heated public debate. The BCP policies towards Bulgarian national questions under communism became the central theme of this discussion. Bulgarian post-communism produced massive reproaches towards the communist party for not acting as a defender of the national interest of the country. The main claim was that communist Bulgaria did not have the correct policy on the national issues during the last 45 years: Macedonia was betrayed and the Turkish issue was not solved. The Bulgarian communists, it was declared, did not rule in the name of the Bulgarian nation. The opposition, the nationalistic parties, and a great deal of the public opinion claimed that the Bulgarian communist past was insufficiently nationalist or nihilist in its attitude towards the

²⁹ See Evgeni Dainov, 'Transition Agenda Abandoned' in Bulgaria in Transition: Three Viewpoints, (Sofia: Centre for Social Practices, 1996), pp.30-47.

national questions. Another aspect of the same attitude was the accusation that Bulgarian communists were blamed for not having an independent and proper Balkan policy during communism. The argument that this was dictated by the Soviets was largely dismissed as exaggerated.³⁰ Post-communist Bulgarian popular opinion demanded national policy, understood as a moral responsibility, not political calculations and manoeuvrings.

The new opposition parties, including the main coalition, the UDF, had to present themselves as much more passionate bearers of the Bulgarian national interests. The opposition was expected to correct the mistakes of the communist past, punish the Bulgarian communists for them and construct a new reality ruled by national justice. In this way the nation became the mental space where the post-communist political debate was taking place in Bulgaria. But nationalism on its own could not give satisfactory answers to the problems facing post-communist Bulgaria. It could neither solve the pressing problems of the declining Bulgarian economy nor could it offer a constructive model of democratic society after the communist experience.³¹ During the period of Bulgarian post-communism questions of national and ethnic identities became to be seen as primary inspiration of mass politics. This was only too natural after the years of communist rule when they were considered a privilege of the communist party. The BSP approach to its past was not to condemn it, but rather to maintain that the wrongs were committed by individual members. The communist party itself was to be kept untainted as much as possible. From 1990 regularly statements were published in

³⁰ See Hopken, Revolution auf Raten, p. 304.

³¹ Krasen Stanchev, Can Economic Reforms Overcome Ethnic Tensions: The Role of Institutions in Bulgaria's Economic Reform. Unpublished paper presented at the 1994 Bucharest SFOS Conference 'Political and Economic Change in the Balkan States', 20 August 1994.

the newspaper *Duma* (previously *Rabotnichesko Delo*) discussing the 'guilt' to the past. This critique had the function of preventing further crisis in the communist party. It stressed that a small number of people at the top of the party structure bore responsibility for whatever went wrong with Bulgarian communism. The new Bulgarian socialists were trying to distance themselves from Soviet communism and to win legitimacy in the West. This was a radical turn in its internationalist policy which until 1989 maintained the supremacy of the Soviets. The BSP claimed that there was no disagreement on the issue of rejoining Europe being the ultimate aim of the Bulgarian foreign policy. The question was rather 'when' and 'how'. The discussion among the young generation of party members was about modernising the BSP as a social-democratic European type modern left party. But until 1997 they were unable neither to clarify their views nor to split from the BSP.³² The new approach had an important function in the post-communist period. It was clear for the leaders of the BSP that they could continue to claim legitimacy as a party capable to rule only if they managed to preserve and to some extent reconstruct some kind of workable past for the communist movement in Bulgaria, but its aims had to be transformed radically. The aim was to reconstruct Bulgaria as a western European type democracy. The former communists could only claim to be more experienced in government than the newly born opposition if their previous experience was not totally rejected. This was particularly important in order to underline the contrast between the communists and the opposition, which was said to have been lacking any political experience. BSP had no choice but to build upon its history as a revolutionary party. Moreover blaming individual members of the party rather than the entire communist regime corresponded with the message coming from the west at the end of the cold war. It was clear that there would be no total international condemnation neither of the ideas nor of the deeds of communism. The movement for human rights stood firmly behind

³² See 'Putyat na Evrolevitsata', *Evrolevitsa*, No.1, February, 1997.

the idea that guilt could be only individual, not collective.³³ There were many fears about possible acts of revenge in the former communist countries and maintaining a peaceful and lawful transition to democracy was the slogan of the day. Communism was not to be condemned but rather to be forgotten. This international policy had the unintended result of actually encouraging the former communists in Bulgaria to struggle to remain in power because they were seen as the future leaders of democratic reforms. The electoral successes of BSP until 1997 to a great extent rested on the perception that some former communist may have done wrongs, but the communist ideas were not altogether so bad as far as they provided the theory behind social security policy. Also because the ordinary middle and low rank members of the former communist party were not dishonoured on the basis of having served a wrong ideology, they remained loyal supporters of BSP. Thus the way to the 're-colouring' (*preboiadisvane*) of the former communists in Bulgaria was paved and the blurring between communist and non-communist beliefs began. From now on the question was not who was wrong in the past, but who would prove right in the future. According to the long-standing tradition of communism envisioning a bright future, the BSP promised to deliver the best for Bulgaria during post-communism were more than generous. The Bulgarian communists, who so much divided the country in the name of the nation, once again were pledging national unity.

³³ For example when in 1992 Andrei Lukanov (prime-minister of Bulgaria in 1990) was imprisoned for alleged financial misdemeanours, he appealed to the European Court in Strasbourg. Many people in Bulgaria viewed that no European institutions should act in defence of political activists who belonged to the communist party.

XIII. Zhelev and the Bulgarian Opposition

Zhelu Zhelev emerged as the most influential intellectual and opposition leader in Bulgaria during the years of post-communism. He became the leader of the UDF in 1989 shortly after the fall of Zhivkov and the first democratically elected president of Bulgaria in 1990.³⁴ Zhelu Zhelev was a very important political figure in Bulgaria during the post-communist period because his personality represented a particular type of Bulgarian leadership, which originated under communism but came to light after its fall. Zhelev's political career illustrated much of the difficulties of the Bulgarian opposition, which aimed to represent both the people and the Bulgarian nation on one side and the new political pluralism on the other.

During the 1980s Zhelev was known as a Marxist philosopher and a moderniser, who viewed that communism must change. He thought that during communism Bulgaria was in a particularly disadvantaged position because it did not have experience in reforms and virtually no tradition of intellectual dissent. Zhelev thought that communist Bulgaria lagged behind Hungary and Poland but that in 1989 she was more ready for change than the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Czechoslovakia.³⁵ Zhelev believed that the Bulgarian intelligentsia together with the Bulgarian masses were the driving forces of the change in 1989. He viewed that the intellectual elite of the country was better prepared for the transition to democracy than the ordinary people, who lagged behind in their political thinking.

³⁴ Duncan M. Perry, Dissident Becomes New President, RFE, 17 August 1990, pp. 3-4.

³⁵ Zhelu Zhelev, Afterword. By Zhelev, Fashizmut (totalitarnata durzhava), (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BZNS, 1990), p. 2.

Zhelev became first known in Bulgaria with the publication of his book *Fascism (Fashizmut totalitarnata durzhava)* in 1982, which was largely interpreted as an allusion to the communist state. The book was withdrawn from sale and effectively banned. But 6,000 copies out of total of 10,000 were sold before the ban came into effect. The book became the bible of the Bulgarian dissent. During the 1980s Zhelev became more active in public life and was among the original members of the Russe Committee and the Club for Glasnost and Democracy.

Zhelev firmly believed in the politics of compromise. This was a controversial stand in post-communist Bulgaria, which had no experience in negotiating political power and most of the supporters of the opposition expected rapid changes, which would improve their life as fast as possible. After the changes in 1989 Zhelev, as a leader of the UDF, engaged in an active dialogue with the former communists. There was a wide-spread opinion that right from the start he chose to co-operate with the former communists rather than to fight and defeat them. On 14 December 1989, the biggest demonstration took place in Sofia. The crowd wanted the removal of article 1 of the Bulgarian communist constitution of 1971, which stated that BCP had the leading role in the state and society. The authorities feared that the tension was so high that the situation may get out of control and lead to violence. Zhelev appeared on the balcony of the presidency and called for the crowd to go home peacefully. He pleaded for understanding and promised understanding on behalf of the rulers. The demonstration ended peacefully. Later was discovered that Petur Mladenov, the then head of the Bulgarian government, was calling for tanks to be used to disperse the crowd.³⁶ Zhelev's cautious approach thus may have been well justified in human terms: no lives were lost. But in political terms, this day marked the end of the euphoria of the Bulgaria 'revolution' and the beginning of

³⁶ Petur Mladenov resigned shortly afterwards in July 1990.

the long and painful post-communist transition. Zhelev was seen as the person who decided that Bulgarian communism was to be followed by peaceful and negotiated transition to democracy. He obviously did not realise how difficult, long and counterproductive this process would be. Most importantly the BSP had the chance to postpone the Bulgarian reforms. The former communists understood the peaceful path to transition as giving them time to rethink their policy, reshuffle their leadership and most importantly to remain in control of the privatisation.

Thus during his presidency (1990-96), Zhelev became known as moderate and popular leader but ineffective political mediator. Post-communist Bulgaria suffered a great setback in economical and political terms during those years when except for nine months in 1992, the BSP ruled the country. It was declared one of the most backward post-communist states, alongside Romania and Albania. Zhelev's style of political compromise was felt in the debate about the Bulgarian national questions. In relation to the Turkish issue, Zhelev supported both the human rights movement but also the former communists' call for 'national reconciliation'. Zhelev also insisted that Bulgaria was a protector of the Jews, he believed in the natural tolerance of the Bulgarian people.³⁷ Although he did not recognise the existence of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, he approved of the translation of his own book into Macedonian language, which at the time provoked a heated debate in Bulgaria because it was interpreted as a recognition of the Macedonian language. Under his presidency Bulgaria recognised Macedonian independence in 1991, but Zhelev maintained that there was no Macedonian nation.

³⁷ See 'Zhelev and Yordanov Address Parliament on Anniversary of Saving Jews', RFE, SWB, EE/1624 b/2, 27 February 1993.

Zhelev started his political career as a reformer in the Gorbachev style but did not develop beyond it. He had no other vision but the very general idea that communism had to be dismantled and democracy had to be built peacefully in Bulgaria. Zhelev was a charismatic leader in the Weberian sense. His peasant background and sincere belief in the virtues of the ordinary Bulgarian people helped him to maintain successfully the image of being a 'commoner'. In this sense his popularity rested on the same premises as his predecessor's, the former Bulgarian communist leader Zhivkov. To be loved by the ordinary Bulgarian people was the emotional priority of both the long-standing communist leader and the first freely elected post-communist president of Bulgaria. He drew his strength from, and therefore in many ways was beholden to, the Bulgarian nation.

XIV. Conclusion

It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that Bulgaria was very disorientated and confused after the collapse of the communist system. The country had to redefine its entire identity. Communism collapsed but democracy seemed still a remote reality. It was no longer clear where Bulgaria belonged. During the years of post-communism the role of the Soviet factor in Bulgarian politics changed dramatically. From being a Soviet satellite, used to hold a safely predetermined position, after 1989 Bulgaria was left to decide its own future independently. Although the old Bulgarian-Soviet ties remained very important in the economic sphere, the entire relationship with Russia needed total reconstruction. Despite the many uncertainties about future Bulgarian-Russian relations, one thing was very clear - they could no longer be based on the principles of communist internationalism. Thus the old cultural bonds came to replace the Bulgarian-Soviet communist alliance. This meant that Bulgaria was to think in a new way about its international position.

Bulgaria's relations with the rest of the countries from the former Eastern European socialist bloc were very weakened. Although Bulgaria was always in the very periphery of what is now defined as Central and Eastern Europe, co-operation with the former socialist countries was considered an integral part of Bulgarian life. Indeed this co-operation was based on the political rather than geopolitical or historical orientation of the countries, which belonged to the former Soviet bloc. The new definitions of post-communist Eastern Europe increasingly excluded Bulgaria and the rest of the Balkan countries. The main organisations of the communist co-operation, the Warsaw Pact and the Comecon, were dissolved and effectively, Bulgaria had no political community of

which to be member.³⁸ Despite the common experience under communism, very soon after the changes, it became quite clear that Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia would be differentiated from Romania, Bulgaria and Albania. The collapse of Yugoslavia was the most unfortunate event that could have happened during this period of total restructuring. The states emerging from the collapse also followed a different path of development.

Such were the circumstances under which post-communist Bulgaria was redirected to the Balkans - the traditional, historical and geographical region she belonged to. Bulgaria was more often defined as a former communist Balkan country, rather than as East European.

³⁸ The Warsaw Pact (formally Warsaw Treaty Organisation) establishing a mutual-defence organisation was formed in 1955. It ceased to exist in 1991. Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), established in 1949 to facilitate and coordinate the economic development of the eastern European countries belonging to the Soviet bloc, was dissolved during the same year. Originally the members of the two organisations were the Soviet Union, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.

Conclusion

Nationalism Under Communism, and After

Communism, as based on Marxist-Leninist theory, relied on the political state alone to solve the problems of nationalism. The Bulgarian Communist Party was the sole holder of political power, which was supposed to direct the development of communist society in all aspects of life, including the area of nationalism and national identities.

Communism came to power in Bulgaria as a Soviet-type political model, which claimed to be internationalist in content. The overarching loyalty to a non-national communist citizenship was among the founding principles of Bulgarian communism. This was the theory, which had to be applied in practice. However, communism steadily lost its political credibility because it was not a consensual system of rule. It increasingly relied on fear and terror for extracting support. At the same time the main source of communist legitimacy became Bulgarian cultural nationalism. Thus the main conclusion of this thesis concerning the general dynamics of communism and nationalism could be defined as follows:

Bulgarian communism subordinated political nationalism to cultural nationalism, which became the driving force of communist politics of nationalism after the official de-Stalinisation of the BCP in 1956.

The interaction of communism with nationalism was facilitated by the long-standing tradition of cultural nationalism based on ethnicity as a political force in the history of Bulgaria. Imperial rule and the movements for national liberation played a central role in the formation of the ideas of nation and nationalism in the whole of Eastern Europe and

the Balkans. Bulgaria serves as a perfect example of this pattern of political development. The striving to unite the nation against a foreign enemy is central for understanding nationalism in the region. In the case of Bulgaria the domination of the Ottoman empire for nearly five centuries has been seen as the main obstacle to the success of nationalism. However communism had to find a balance between domestic national ambitions and the demands of the Soviet power in relation to national questions. For most of the time the Soviet leadership determined the limits of communist policies on issues of nationalism. The Soviet communist party presented one major condition in this respect - the unquestionable supremacy of the Soviets in Eastern Europe. But Bulgarian communism was particularly advantaged in its relation to the Soviet communism from the point of view of nationalism. As this research illustrates, in the case of Bulgarian communism, loyalty to Soviet power did not necessarily mean the suppression of Bulgarian nationalism. On the contrary, Bulgaria's satellite position actually satisfied many of the old Bulgarian national aspirations. The old Bulgarian-Russian friendship based on common religion and linguistic similarity was successfully promoted under the banner of Bulgarian-Soviet internationalism. The main Soviet concern in relation to Bulgarian communism was Bulgaria's relations with its neighbours, which had to guarantee USSR's control in the region. Thus, the Macedonian question in Bulgaria was of very little importance to the Soviets so long as it did not permit closer alliance between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, as Yugoslav refused to be subdued by Moscow. Similarly, the Soviets did not object to the BCP policy towards the Bulgarian Turks until the mid-1980s. Turkey was a traditional enemy of Russia and the USSR, and friendship with Bulgaria was not encouraged. Also, Jewish emigration from Bulgaria immediately after the Second World War was strongly encouraged by the Soviet line at the time, which supported the creation of Israel. After that, the fate of the Bulgarian Jews under communism was of no particular interest to Moscow.

This study argues that Bulgarian communism proved very weak in maintaining political nationalism as the main motivation of its policies towards national questions. The BCP saw ethnic diversity as a major threat to its power as a leader of the Bulgarian political state. Therefore, soon after assuming power, Bulgarian communism started to promote the idea of Bulgaria being an ethnically homogenous nation-state. At the same time, Bulgarian communism aimed to gain the support of the ethnic Bulgarian majority by eliminating ethnic difference.

Under communism two mass resettlements took place in Bulgaria: between 1947-49, over 45,000 Jews left for Israel, and in the summer of 1989 over 300,000 Turks left to Turkey. At other times there were additional waves of controlled emigration on a smaller scale. As a result, on the eve of the collapse of communism, Bulgaria had a smaller number of ethnically different people than ever before in its modern history.

As I have argued consistently in this study, the policies of Bulgarian communism in Bulgaria in relation to national questions could not be understood separately from its understanding of nations and nationalism. The analysis of the politics of nationalism under Bulgarian communism required a careful consideration of communist party policies on questions of political and cultural nationalism, national identity, national mythology, ethnicity and citizenship. This research illustrates that nationalism was a central feature of the communist experience in Bulgaria. Thus the second main conclusion of this study could be formulated as follows:

The major impact of communism on Bulgarian nationalism is not to be sought in the way communism disconnected from the bourgeoisie nationalism of the past, but rather in the manner in which communism reconnected to cultural nationalism based on Bulgarian ethnicity as an instrument of political power.

On a more general note, the thesis illustrates the constraints of communism as a theory of modernity. The communist theory of modernity rested on the premise that the communist state embodied the ideas of political progress. Communism as the rule of the one-party state was supposed to direct every aspect of life. Communism saw the society as a unit, which needed to be told what to think and how to act in all circumstances, including in the realm of national identities. This perception of the role of political power in society strengthened the ‘*etatist*’ tradition in Eastern Europe. Communist modernity in general was concerned primarily with class identity. The failure of communism to recognise ethnic difference as an essential element of modern society turned it into a dry theoretical construct having very little to do with real life, which was much more complicated and required a more subtle approach towards culture. This research shows that Bulgarian communism offered simple answers to the very difficult question of the resilience of national identities not only of ethnic groups but also of the communist leaders themselves. Communism promised that national questions would be solved naturally during the course of the maturing of the political communist identity. But the lack of inclusive political thinking in relation to national identities was central to the failure of communism as a legitimate political system.

The third major conclusion of this study concerns the way dynamics between communism and nationalism affected the perceptions of history in Eastern Europe and the Balkans in particular. Here the role of myth is most central. Communism endowed history with strong moralistic meaning. History was viewed as an experience of the past,

on which communism had the task of passing judgement. The judgement of history was centred around the idea that history was right when it led to the fulfilment of the aims of communism, and wrong when it did not. Therefore communism was interested in selective history only. Communist accounts of Bulgarian history had two main goals: a) to present a version of history which supports the idea that the communists' coming to power was inevitable and a natural result of the maturing of the class-consciousness of the Bulgarians, and b) to connect communism with cultural nationalism in order to maintain continuity. Myth became the mental and intellectual construct which was supposed to provide cohesiveness to these otherwise incoherent aims of communist history. The mythical aspects of Bulgarian communist historiography gave it a strong symbolic meaning. The history of Bulgaria was designed to symbolise the glory of the Bulgarian communist nation. Therefore the third main conclusion of this study highlights communism's effort to construct a highly selective history held together by myths, and can be formulated as follows:

Communism used history as a narrative designed according to communist ideas about the Bulgarian nation. In communist historiography events were accounted for by a conceptualised model which was designed by the communist leadership in order to justify its own political aims.

This predetermined and moralising way of writing history profoundly affected the perception of history. In Bulgaria history is expected to serve one or another cause depending on the political circumstances of the day.

The National Questions

This study illustrates that national questions were central to communist politics in Bulgaria. There are several implications from this. Communism intensified feelings of fearful defensiveness and insecurity, which were deeply ingrained in the traditions of Bulgarian nationhood. This applies to both the Bulgarian majority and to the ethnic minorities in the country. Although through its policies Bulgarian communism promoted exclusive cultural Bulgarian nationalism, for most of its rule this was denied officially. Whenever the communist leadership showed its own dedication to Bulgarian cultural nationalism, Bulgarian society tended to interpret it as communist manoeuvres to maintain political control rather than genuine conviction. Paradoxically, communism, which struggled so hard to promote the supremacy of the ethnic Bulgarian nation, was blamed for having failed it. From here derived two general perceptions of great importance for the understanding of Bulgarian nationalism under post-communism. First, it was largely thought that communism undermined Bulgarian nationalism and Bulgarian national identity, which were never abandoned by the Bulgarian people. Second, ethnic nationalism came to be seen as an alternative to communism, which became particularly apparent at the fall of communism and during the post-communist period.

Communism had serious implications for the Macedonian question in Bulgaria. The fact that Bulgarian communism obeyed Soviet demands over this major national question encouraged the belief that communism betrayed the unity of Bulgarian nationhood. The way the BCP toyed with the establishment of the Macedonian nation according to Moscow's instructions gave rise to the strong belief in Bulgaria that communism was the sole reason for the success of Macedonian nationhood. But once communism was gone,

such understanding of the Macedonian question proved deeply insufficient and post-communist Bulgaria had to grapple with the long-term implications of communist policy.

At the same time, communism radically changed the position of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. All Turks in Bulgaria suffered substantially because of communist policy, and it is likely that more than 200,000 left the country permanently. But as this study argues, it is very doubtful that the Bulgarian Turks would have become a major political force in the country without their experience under communism. The way the anti-Turkish campaign of 1984-85 backfired, as well as the role Turkish politics played in the fall of Bulgarian communism, gave the Turkish identity in Bulgaria new meaning. Unintended as it was, communist policy towards the largest ethnic minority of Bulgaria facilitated the political assertion of its ethnic identity. Moreover, this development led to demands for revising the entire perception of the Turkish presence in Bulgarian history and culture.

The politics of the Jewish identity in Bulgaria under communism also had significant implications. As a result of emigration to Israel and the largely successful cultural assimilation of those who remained in communist Bulgaria, the Jewish community lost a significant part of its cultural sense. Once having actively connected Bulgarian culture to the rest of the world, Jewish life in Bulgaria during communism was reduced to the local politicised question of Bulgaria's role in the Second World War. The majority of the Bulgarian Jews who chose to stay in communist Bulgaria sincerely hoped that communism would solve the problems of Jewish identity by promoting citizens' equality. Instead, Bulgarian communism put strict limitations on Jewishness and therefore greatly disappointed the majority of the members of the Jewish community, which had previously been very faithful to Bulgaria.

Future Work

A number of themes for future work emerge from this research. The results of this study show that a further enquiry into the dynamics between communism and nationalism may reach new dimensions if analysed as co-existing theories of collective identity. The way communism used nationalism may have further implications for understanding what impact global theories, such as communism, have on understanding issues of nations and nationalism, particularly in the context of the globalisation of the modern world. At the same time, the particular pattern of communism becoming compatible with cultural nationalism in order to maintain power confirms that under some circumstances political ideologies develop survival strategies which rest on their opposites. Was communism the only ideology in the post-war history of Europe which resorted to exclusive nationalism in its pursuit to power?

On a more regional level, the results of this study show that the interaction between communism and nationalism gave Bulgaria and the rest of the former communist Eastern Europe a particular experience, which is now a distinct part of their political and cultural heritage. The main question which arises from this peculiarity concerns the future of the integration of Eastern Europe and the Balkans into the West in general and the EU in particular. With their experience of communism and nationalism, what kind of political culture may the former communist countries bring into Europe? And how may it change Europe? These are questions reaching beyond the politics of the political left in western Europe, which until 1989 was the obvious political and intellectual element affected by the developments of Eastern Europe under communism. Rather, I am thinking about the ability of European history and culture to accept the Eastern European experience of nationalism and communism as a legitimate part of its tradition

instead of rejecting it as a disability of the 'other' less European Europe – as Eastern Europe has been most often defined. The difficulties endured by Bulgaria are glaring, but its experience is deeply European, and as it and its neighbouring states and others in Eastern Europe develop, they may offer lessons to the Continent as a whole.

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